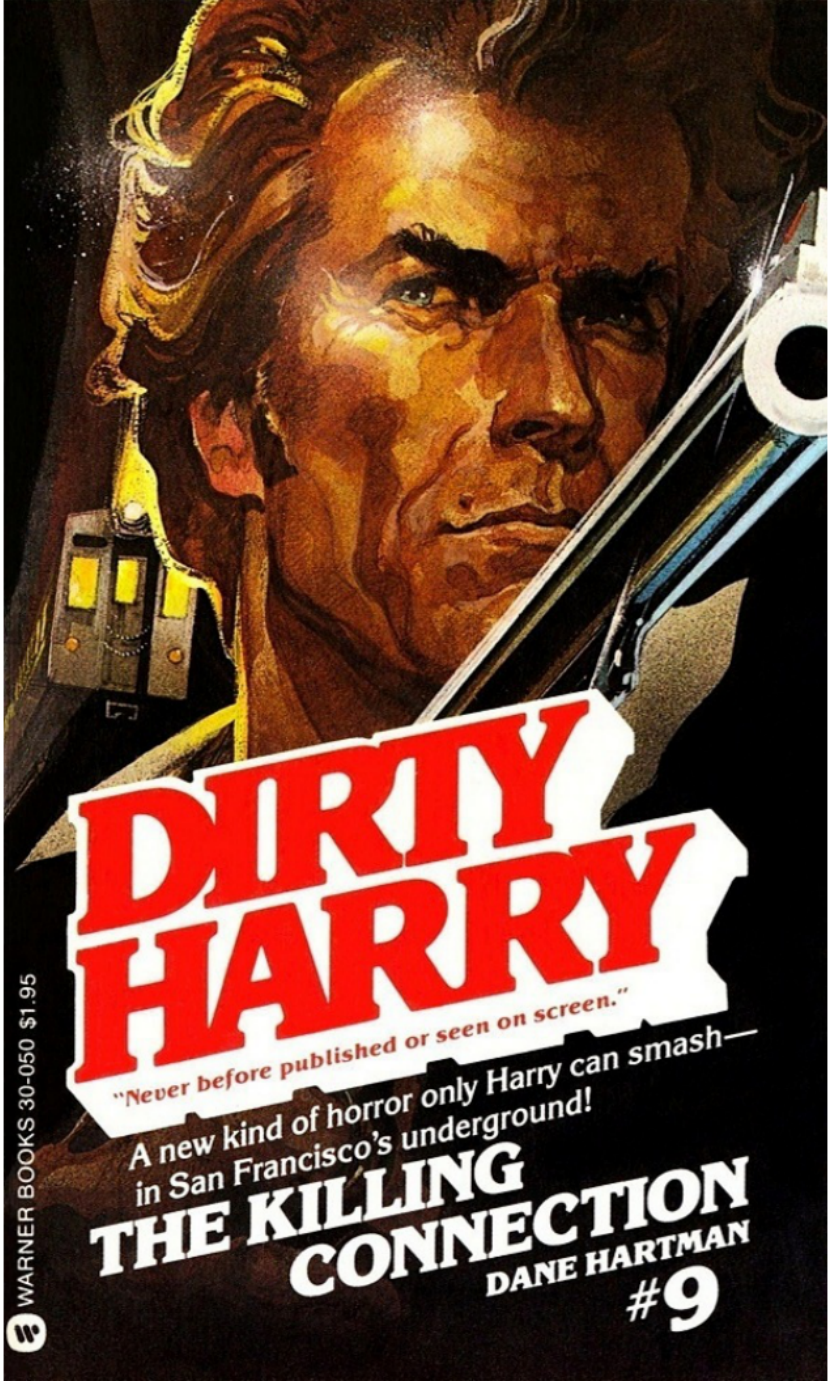
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#9
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DAMNED IF HE DOESN'T.
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Harry raised his stein of beer to his lips. But he didn't stop there. With one quick sweep of his arm, he threw the stinging brew directly into the eyes of the man to his right. Blinded, the gunman sputtered back, his snubnose revolver wavering.

Harry kept his momentum, letting the toss whirl him around, and grabbed a fistful of the man's shirt. He pulled him forward just as two men by the booth aimed and fired.

Their point-blank ammo sparked across the room and burrowed into the trunk of their friend. Harry felt the hood jerk in his hands as the tiny balls of lead ripped up his insides . . .

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DIRTY HARRY #9

The Killing Connection

Dane Hartman

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DIRTY HARRY #9

THE KILLING CONNECTION

CHAPTER

One

Everything looked fine until the girls kissed. Up until then, they simply looked like two girlfriends coming home after a movie or a late dinner. There was nothing unusual in that. In fact, it was a real good idea to pair up on these balmy September San Francisco nights. Between the fog and the intermittent showers, a person had to be careful.

In this case, only one of these girls showed any concern at all. And that concern was limited to an occasional glance in some direction other than the face of her companion. While the pairing of the two was not unusual, the same could not be said of the pair themselves. For while many sets of women walked the city streets, not all of them were this striking.

The brunette was taller, at least five foot seven in her medium heels. She wore a casual suit, well-tailored slacks, a sweater, and a light jacket. She could have been a model, but her face had an open freshness which ran counter to the angular bent fashion editors prefer. Her cheeks were high and round, her dark eyes sleepy and her red lips full. Between searching looks at the night mist, she smiled down at her partner as she walked.

The other girl was shorter. With a mane of cascading hair whose color lay between blonde and auburn; deep, dark blue eyes; innocent, serene features; and a compact, but devastatingly rich body, she gave off an impression of sweet lust. While the brunette was elegant, the blonde radiated sensuality.

The tense male hands checked the snugness of his thin, form-fitting black gloves for the fifth time since the two women appeared from around the corner of Arguello Boulevard.

Even with the fog the man saw them kiss. While the two women moved in and out of his vision, the rolling white stuff creating makeshift camouflage, there was no mistaking their actions in the apartment house foyer. The two walked up the brownstone steps, oblivious to everything around them but each other. Their arms snaked up onto each others' backs, as if they were making sure neither slipped. But even this act revealed a tenderness, a deeper consideration. There was something more than friendship here.

That much became crystal clear when the blonde unlocked the front door and the two entered the illuminated anteroom. From the man's vantage point, the duo executed a silent routine in which the blonde looked one way while the brunette looked the other, then the two switched gazes. It was obvious that they were checking to see that no one was watching.

Satisfied that no prying eyes would witness their moment of passion, the two wrapped their arms around each other in a tender hold. For a moment, they smiled at each other with a contented gaze. Then they kissed. It was a luxuriant, full caress. An expression of profound commitment, ending with a look that said they knew something not many others, homosexual or otherwise, knew. They knew the meaning of love.

For a moment, the man felt a rush of envy rising up inside him, but just as he was trying to identify it as such, it turned into a blazing hatred. The gloved hand checked his jacket pockets, feeling the comforting, round hard shape there. He heard metal clink against metal, then he moved sideways, edging into the fog-filled night.

"Are you sure you can't stay?" Kim Byrnes asked with honest longing.

"I really wish I could," Lisa Patterson replied with an insecure glance out the front door at the mist-covered street. "But I'm expecting a call." The brunette smiled with anticipation. "About the part, you know."

Kim's nose and eyes crinkled in a mischievous expression. "Why don't you go home and set your phone for call forwarding to here?"

Lisa shook her head slightly in pleased disbelief. "I need my sleep," she laughed. "Honestly, I've never met anyone like you before."

"And you never will again," Kim said, feigning jealousy. "Remember that."

Lisa became serious. "I won't," she promised sincerely. "How could I?"

Again, the two needed no words to express the bond between them.

Reluctantly, Lisa broke the clinch. "I really have to go," she said with concern, looking outside, as if trying to convince herself as well.

"Do you want me to call a cab?" the smaller girl asked, reading her lover's face.

Lisa thought about it for a while. "No," she finally decided. "The park is beautiful this time of the night."

Kim skeptically followed her lover's gaze out the front door. She saw the mist, alternately thin and thick, rolling across the edge of

Golden Gate Park. “I don’t know, Lisa,” she said reluctantly. “I really think you should call a cab.”

Lisa looked at her friend, then laughed lightly. “Nonsense,” she said. “I won’t hear of it. There’s no reason I shouldn’t be able to walk home.”

“You never know who’s out there,” Kim said with more than concern.

“You forget,” she said eagerly. “If I can’t see them, they can’t see me either.”

This time, it was Kim’s turn to laugh. “I never can change your mind about anything, can I?” she mused. “Once you make up your mind about something, that’s it.”

“That’s it,” Lisa agreed. “Don’t worry. I’ll be all right.”

Kim nodded bravely, unable to clear her expression of concern. “All right,” she echoed. “But call me when you get in, OK?”

“OK,” Lisa agreed, using that as a cue to part. She turned and pushed open the front door. She paused and turned back to her partner. “I love you,” she said simply.

“I love you too,” Kim replied, not having moved from where Lisa had left her. “Be careful.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” Lisa quipped, trying to lighten the mood. “You’re already home.”

Kim laughed as Lisa exited, each giving the other a last wave. Kim then watched her friend trot down the steps and walk across the street. She kept watching until Lisa disappeared into the mist-enshrouded dark, remembering the times they had together—both upstairs in her apartment and in Lisa’s place on Kirkham Street. She remembered the security and the warmth. Then she shivered.

Turning away from the empty street and empty foyer, she dug into her pocketbook for the key to the second door. That was one thing she liked about the building. Although they didn’t have a doorman, like Lisa’s apartment house, they had decent security, with well-lit hallways and solid construction. It was comforting for a girl like her to know that she was safe.

After all, she was an old-fashioned girl, she thought. Leaving home had been a tough enough decision, so it was a pleasure to find a place in the big city where she felt so comfortable. Here, in San Francisco, she could still take long walks, scout the antique shops, and wear as much lace as she could find. She enjoyed being a woman, so she acted and dressed like it.

Tonight, for instance. While Lisa looked comfortably casual with her

jacket and slacks, Kim was more friskily feminine with a soft, breezy patterned dress belted at her slim waist. She felt the fabric fluttering against her moving thighs when she walked, a reminder of her disappointment with Lisa's departure.

As she moved up the stairs and along the landing past the first two floor doors, she also felt the material of what she wore beneath the dress. She had, after all, dressed that evening to kill. Below the v-neck of the dress was a soft, satin bra and panties as well as a lace garter belt and shiny hose. It all ended with dark beige ankle strap heels which were far harder to walk in than Lisa's conservative shoes.

The second floor landing was as empty as the first. In actuality, the building was one big, roughly circular staircase consisting of carpeted steps, wall-length landings, and a thick, round, wooden bannister. The apartments themselves seemed merely an appendage. The wall was nicely papered and old-fashioned double lamps were installed high on the walls. They gave the building a burnished glow.

As nice as they were, they shed little light, only enough to cast a pale shadow. Kim wasn't the kind to think that the landlord installed twenty-five watt bulbs because they saved him half-a-penny in electricity. She was the type who wanted to feel that he had done it to create the proper mood.

Basking in the warmth of her evening and the golden dimness of the house, Kim pushed the third key on her brass key ring into the first lock on her door, and turned to hear the tumblers open. Then the fourth key went into the second lock. Pulling out the metal opener, she dumped the keys into her pocketbook while turning the doorknob. The last things she made note of before entering was that she was glad the door had one of those crystal-like knobs cut like a gem. The door itself was so strong, solid, and thick.

The hall light drained into the dark apartment. Kim knew she should have left a light on, but every little saving helped, especially on her salary. Even without the illumination, she could see where the mock oriental rug ended and the framing teakwood floor started. She took pleasure in picturing the entire second floor apartment in her mind.

Small, but exceptionally comfortable, there was the entrance which led to a small eating area. To the left was the kitchen. The two doors off that led to the bath and bedroom. Moving forward from the door, the dining spot spilled into the living room with its plush sofa sitting before the bay window which looked out over the park.

Moving back to close the door and turn on the light, she realized that a large shadow had brushed by her breasts just as the door closed

firmly behind her.

A moment after that sensation, Kim succeeded in quelling her initial surprise. It could've been anything, she told herself. Maybe she had left a window slightly open. It had been a bit muggy the last few days, so she could have, almost unconsciously, left a living room window ajar to let in some cool night air. Or it could be the breeze from the closing door.

Secure in that rationalization, Kim relaxed, only to tense again when a hand clamped around the wrist of her arm reaching for the light.

Kim was caught off guard, the cry caught in her throat. She breathed deeply, her lungs filling and her back arching.

At that moment, the hand left her wrist. It reached up and slapped around her mouth. But instead of covering her lips to stifle the noise, the tough, hard fingers were pushed into her open mouth. Kim suddenly had a mental picture of the intruder breaking her jaw by pulling her mouth apart. Just as she brought a sound up through her larynx, his other hand appeared, holding a red rubber ball.

The thing swung down across her face. As it passed, she could just glimpse, through closing eyes, two tails on either side of the ball flapping behind it. Then all her concentration was centered on her scream. She could feel it was in her throat and her mind leaped ahead to when its sound would burst into the apartment and swell through the entire building.

The sound was cut off by the ball being rammed against her teeth. Her shocked struggle was momentarily stilled and the shout cut off as her eyes snapped open and her jaw forced apart. The strong pressure behind the three inch hunk of rubber was pushing her mouth to its very widest opening. It silenced her completely.

She painfully tried to fight against it just as the ball snapped in place almost behind her teeth. It was large enough to force her tongue down so she couldn't push it out. It was alien enough to sap her full strength. All her attention focused on the red ball.

By the time she was able to get enough pressure inside her mouth to dislodge it, quick fingers tightened its two tail straps on the back of her head. Knotting it quickly, he fastened it against the back of her neck. The rubber ball was now securely in the girl's mouth.

With quick viciousness, his fingers snapped around her left wrist again. She cried out at the tight roughness of his grip, but all she heard was a distant grunting. To her astonishment, she felt saliva and mucous building up in her mouth—her body reacting to the rubber wedging in her mouth as if it were something to eat.

She felt her attacker pulling her left arm until it was straight down her back. As her forearm was pushed against the rear of her dress, she felt something hard encircling her wrist and heard a click. The attacker's fingers let go, but the pressure did not let up. She still couldn't raise her left arm.

But she could raise her right. And just as she did, the attacker reached between her shoulder and neck to grab a hunk of material covering her stomach.

"So you like pussy too, huh, bitch?" he whispered in her ear as he pulled her dress up. "Well, I love pussy and I just want to make sure yours won't go to waste."

The attacker pulled until the hem of her dress rose past the garter straps and panties. Then he reached down quickly. Kim looked down, her eyes wide, to see the man hand-off the free end of a pair of handcuffs to himself. Holding it tight in his right hand, he swung his left arm around her body, then handed the end back. He pulled her cuffed left hand between her legs from the back while grabbing her right wrist.

The attacker picked her flailing arm out of the air like a sharpshooter. He half-pushed, half-pulled the limb down her own front until it was parallel to her left arm. Then he professionally snapped the open end of the handcuff around her unencumbered wrist.

"You like that dike meat, huh, baby?" he hissed at her. "You like it a lot, huh?"

Her cuffed hands were on either side of her crotch, one in front and the other behind—the short chain digging into her vagina through the satin of her underwear. To keep her upright, his hands had left her arms and were grabbing across her front.

"How does it feel, baby?" she heard him coo into her ear. Then his fingers were everywhere, rubbing, slapping, grabbing. Without ceremony, he slipped one hand into her dress and behind her bra. The other settled again on her right wrist. He kneaded her ample chest with one while pulling up with the other. Her head rolled back against his chest and shoulders, her eyes looking wildly at the ceiling, tiny burbling noises and spit coming out from behind the ball.

"How does it feel?" he repeated with a savage pleasure.

There was cutting pain at her wrists and shoulders, a twinging hurt across her chest and a burning ache between her legs.

How did it feel? It was a mockery of the tenderness and giving she had shared with Lisa. It was a vicious travesty of heterosexual affection.

“Feel good?” the attacker continued, holding the small girl upright, practically lifting her off the floor as he rubbed her breast and pulled the handcuff chain even tighter against her loins. Kim tried to scream, but the rubber ball diminished the call into a gurgling rattle.

“No,” the attacker guessed, his face a dark blotch above her head. “Well, maybe that’s because you’ve never had a real man, bitch. Maybe you’ve never had a man at all because of that dike meat. It only hurts because you’ve been starving for dick meat, baby.”

He grabbed either side of her dress’ neck line and ripped it apart. Kim tried to bend over and twist away from the man, but her awkwardly cuffed hands kept her from moving too far.

She made it into the kitchen, but slammed up against the table. Before she could right herself again, the man was upon her. Only this time they were face to face.

The first thing she saw was not his visage, but the long stiletto he held up between her eyes. It seemed to gleam in the moonlit apartment.

“You want it, don’t you?” he asked ominously, the words coming to her from a darkened, seemingly featureless face. He twisted the blade around slowly, as if it were a beautiful work of art to be savored. “Something long and sharp and hard, right?”

Tears of pain coursed out of her widened eyes, but she couldn’t get anything but her neck to move. It twisted her head slowly from side to side.

“But not this, right?” the attacker said, going along with her motion. “Something else . . . somewhere else.”

With that, the knife point drooped, and started a slow descent down her front. The knife point stopped as it pointed at the thin strand which held her bra’s two cups together. Curling his fingers around it, the man snapped it in two. The satin fell aside, leaving her chest totally exposed. Kim turned her head away as she felt her skin reddening.

“What a shame to waste this,” he breathed, caressing her breasts again on either side of her cuffed arms. He moved in close, letting the switchblade drop further until the point barely touched her hip. “How could you keep all this from us?” he admonished, his breath coming in faster gasps.

He pressed with both his body and his hands until Kim was practically pushed back onto the table. To keep her balance, she had to push forward, her legs kicking, until she found herself almost sitting. She still couldn’t see her attacker’s face—only feel his wiry strength, smell his stinking skin, his alcohol-coated breath, his smoke-

soaked clothes, and sense his rage.

It was only when she was practically sitting on the table did he snap out of his frenzy of desire. Pulling back, he wrapped one hand in her hair and lifted the blade to her neck.

“You want it, don’t you?” he asked, pushing his crotch against hers. “Tell me you want it.”

What emerged from her filled mouth was a meaningless jumble of noises. But the tone was enough to get her meaning across.

“Come on, bitch,” he said threateningly, pushing the knife harder against her throat. “Tell me you want it.” Kim nodded abruptly—twice.

“That’s my girl,” the man said with satisfaction. Pulling her off the table by her hair, he pulled the knife back until it was next to his head. “Well, I won’t be needing this anymore,” he said, nimbly closing it with one hand. “You hold it for me.” Still keeping a tight grip on her hair, he lowered his blade hand to her leg, pulling up what was left of her skirt. Then he pushed the knife between her skin and the top of the stocking.

“Now come on,” he said roughly, half-walking, half-dragging her into the living room. As soon as his foot entered the room, he threw her forward with both hands, propelling her onto the couch. She landed on her side and bounced onto her back. Instantly, she tried to bend her legs to pull her stretched, aching arms in front of her. But again, he was too quick. Seeing what she was trying to do, he jumped on her.

He grabbed her right wrist again and pushed her left leg up until it was bent flat against her front. He did it so brutally that all the air was knocked out of her and she struggled for breath while he pulled her left arm out from behind her. Her shoulder and arms stretched until she was sure the bones would break. Suddenly both her hands were in front of her.

Before she could fight back with them though, the man quickly undid her belt, slipped the handcuff chain behind it, then buckled it tightly in place again. She could only scratch at his crushing torso. She tried to sit up, to push him away, but she wasn’t strong enough.

“Relax, bitch,” he told her. “You don’t know what you’re missing.”

He twisted her until she sat straight on the couch. Then he pushed her back when she tried to roll past him onto the floor. Laughing, he pushed her legs apart and wedged his own kneeling body between them.

Kim didn’t look at the rest. She arched her body away from the

man, succeeding in raising her crotch to his level. That left her head behind the top of the low-back couch. She didn't see him undoing his own belt. But she felt it all. Every panicked sensation, every feeling fueling her terror.

Out the window, she could see an upside down view of Golden Gate Park. And dimly in the distance she thought she could make out—just for a second—the figure of another girl, a brunette, walking under an overhead lamp in the distance.

When it was all over, and the man finally finished satisfying himself they both relaxed, spent. Almost reluctantly, he reached up and unfastened the ball gag between her teeth. Then he pulled on its straps until it popped out of her mouth.

Kim licked her dry lips and worked her aching jaw for a second before she sighed, closed her eyes, and pulled herself up to a sitting position.

"Come on, stupid," she said, wiggling her fingers. "Get these things off me. It's her you're supposed to attack. Not me."

CHAPTER

Two

The light from above seemed sent from heaven. For most of her trip along the Park paths, Lisa Patterson had laughed at her own fears whenever they had popped up. Everytime she felt some paranoia coming on, she breathed deeply and looked carefully around her. The park was indeed beautiful at this time of year and she stopped for awhile to appreciate the nighttime loveliness of her surroundings.

The rest of San Francisco sparkled overhead and in the distance, the fog added sparkling white highlights to the skyscrapers and brownstone-filled hills. As for the park itself, it was lush and filled with finely manicured green foliage which prospered in the sixty-five degree autumn weather. And pervading it all was the lonely, symphonic choir of the fog horns.

Lisa took it all in and decided that she was glad she had decided to walk home. Upon reflection, she decided that her nervousness was merely defensive. For some reason, however, she couldn't completely shake the feeling of unease. She had crossed the park many times before and never felt this edgy, this uncomfortable. Maybe it was the unusual amount of moisture in the air, but even though she stayed in the middle of the path and amid the lightest areas possible, it didn't succeed in soothing her discomfort.

Suddenly she stopped. She turned to look back at Kim's apartment window off in the distance. She stood until the wisps of fog cleared enough for her to see that the bay window was dark. She must have gone right to bed, Lisa assumed, staring at the blank flat glass for a few moments more. Something about the dark, seemingly empty apartment brought up a feeling of regret within the woman. She turned and continued on her way, her pace brisk.

To make the remainder of her trip easier, Lisa thought about the girl she had left behind and that lightened her mood considerably. Kim was ridiculously attractive. Between her almost strawberry blonde locks, her big blue eyes, her sweet features, her long legs, small waist and large, strong breasts, she was the kind of woman men would kill for.

Lisa knew that Kim was all too aware of her effect on men. She had been petitely attractive at thirteen, but when her chest began to

blossom three years later, the male population of her town and school could hardly contain itself. Kim got lust, desire, need, longing, yearning, coveting, jealousy, envy, infatuation, ardor, and hate—everything but consideration and respect. Even her own family confused love with overprotection. To counter this, they gave her everything she wanted. They did everything she wanted except treat her like a human being.

Coming to her high school for a lecture on theatrical design, Lisa couldn't help but notice her in the third row. Their eyes met and the two immediately felt a kinship even though Lisa was six years older. At that point, there had been no way for Kim to have known that Lisa Patterson had been a lesbian since her own high school graduation.

After Kim had approached her after the talk, expressing an interest in the theater, the two had corresponded, their loving relationship growing from that beginning. Lisa could tell from her letters what Kim needed and practically ached with the desire to give her that tenderness. So when the teenager graduated from high school, Lisa jumped at the chance to offer her a job and schooling while Kim jumped at the chance to take it.

Things proceeded smoothly from there. Lisa did not need to force her—Kim seemed to slip into homosexuality naturally, as if she had been waiting her whole life for it. Their mutual affection blossomed naturally. Neither seemed to have anyplace else to turn for the love they both so desperately wanted.

So now, for almost two years, their lives were almost idyllic. Each had their freedom, but neither wanted anyone or anything else.

Refreshed by her memories, Lisa looked up from the path, and stepped forward into the body of a huge man.

She reared back, unable to stifle the small shriek of surprise and alarm. Her shoes slipped on the mist-slickened asphalt, knocking her off-balance. Her arms wide, she fell back on the path, all but helpless before the muscular man.

Looking up in dread, she saw the solid form of a mustachioed man in a police uniform. "Are you all right, Miss?" the cop asked.

Lisa exhaled deeply in relief, the breath ending in an embarrassed laugh. "Yes," she finally said. "Thank you, officer."

He held his hand out and she took it. As he picked her up off the path, he continued, "Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you." As she rose, she saw his night stick, handcuffs, and gun firmly holstered in his belt.

"That's all right," she said, brushing the dirt from her pants. "My mind was elsewhere."

"Better get it back here," he suggested. "It's best not to do too much savoring of nature at night."

Lisa looked at his smooth, young face. She could feel it already. By his tone, his stance, his manner. He was coming on to her. And why not, she thought. She might not have been a Kim Byrnes, but she was no piker either. She might not have had a thirty-six inch bust on a five-three frame but thirty-four on a five-seven body was nothing to sneeze at either.

Only she wasn't interested. Men wanted her, sure, but they wanted Kim more. But she had for herself what they all wanted. And what would all those poor saps do if they knew she could satisfy the girl much better than all of them put together?

"Just walking home, officer," she told him. "I've done it many times before."

"Trouble only has to happen once," he told her. "You've got to be careful after dark."

Lisa laughed, deciding to take the cop for a little tease ride. "Are you trying to tell me that San Francisco's finest can't even keep the streets safe for women at night?"

The cop smiled back. "We can't be everywhere at once," he said. Looking around, he continued, "There's a lot of queers around here at this time of night. Let me walk you to where you're going."

Whatever slim chance the cop had of accompanying Lisa to her door was shattered by his last, callous remark. Her eyes narrowing, Lisa told herself not to let her defensiveness show too clearly. "Thanks, but no thanks," she said lyrically. "I can take care of myself."

Hearing the right tone, but not the right words, the cop was taken a bit aback. "I don't doubt that," he recovered smoothly. "I just thought you might like the company."

Opening her handbag, Lisa showed him what she had inside. Nestled among the other stuff was a whistle on a chain and a flask of Mace. "This is all the company I need," she said pointedly, slipping the whistle around her neck. "If I need you, I'll just blow." She snapped the pocketbook shut and walked by him. "Now why don't you do the same?"

The cop watched her stride off in amazement before his features set in an expression that mixed anger with disappointment. "Ball buster," he muttered under his breath, walking away and scratching his head.

Lisa was proud of herself. She walked with a new spring in her step, having struck a blow for gay rights. She glanced over her shoulder every few steps to see how the cop had reacted. She kept looking until

she saw his figure turn the far corner.

As soon as he had disappeared, she slowed, finally stopping near the side of the path. As she thought about it, she decided his punishment was enough. What was just a minor rebuttal when he had labeled as "queers" all those pitiful young hustlers desperately looking for some sort of honest affection? Queers, were they? Well, she would show him just how queer she could be. The young bastard in uniform deserved whatever he got. And Lisa Patterson was just the kind of girl to give it to him.

She decided to blow her little whistle and disappear. That way he'd come running, only not to find her. And if that worked well enough, Lisa would think about signaling him again, simply so she could repeat the process until he was sufficiently winded. Patterson smiled to herself. It wasn't the best or the most fitting retribution, but it would do quite nicely.

She kept smiling and looking at the spot where the cop had turned the corner in the mist while reaching for the whistle which lay on her chest. Her hand touched the spot where it had lain, only to feel the metal tube slip out of her fingers. That surprise was not as great as the one that tightened her throat. She could feel the unmistakable sensation of the whistle's chain tightening around her neck. She initially thought that the thin but strong links had caught on a branch lining the edge of the path where a tall row of foliage served as a natural fence.

She moved back and reached up, expecting the chain to loosen. Only as she moved, the chain tightened and bit into her skin even more, sending a bolt of constricting pain up into her brain. Her shock was complete when her hand raised to touch on something human. A fist had snapped the chain whistle up so it made a noose around her neck.

Her mouth opened as the chain grew tighter. The words she wanted to yell were cut off by the sudden backwards jerk of the assaulting fingers. The abrupt jerk was enough to knock her off-balance so she fell into the line of bushes behind her. Her weight was enough to widen the hole her attacker had stuck his hand through.

As she fell, her subconscious hoped for a crash of breaking branches to signal her distress, but the plants only served as a muffling curtain. There was hardly any noise as she was pulled through. The only real noise she could have made was cut off at her neck by the band of metal that was sinking deeper and deeper into her throat.

The panic was complete as Lisa's mouth opened and closed soundlessly and her fingers dug at the chain. Dimly, she remembered

what the salesgirl had said about the whistle, necklace combination when she bought it.

“Especially made for the city woman,” she had proudly proclaimed. “We have a whole line of break-resistant jewelry for the urban working woman. Guaranteed not to fall apart no matter how hard the tug. The only way to break these chains is with a hammer and chisel.”

Lisa prayed desperately that the salesgirl had been exaggerating. The adornment she was wearing for protection was now killing her. No matter how she tugged at it, the necklace was still impossibly tight against her windpipe. To her own breathless panic, she could feel the strong steel sink down and start to cut through her flesh.

There was a sudden and temporary reprieve when her body fell to the ground on the other side of the foliage fence. The chain loosened, but only for a second. In that second, Lisa managed to breath deeply and tried to get up. Her legs kicked but she couldn’t get her arms to stop trying to pull the necklace away from her throat.

A moment later and her chance was lost. With an even more brutal tug, the chain was slicing away at her again and the assaulter’s other hand wrapped itself in the coils of Patterson’s long, thick dark hair. To her continued astonishment, her assaulter was now dragging her across the grass by her mane and neck.

She twisted, kicked, and struggled breathlessly, feeling as if she was being dragged behind a mule by a noose. All her life systems were sending panic signals into her brain. But while her interior broiled and screamed, the park remained deathly quiet save for the gentle murmurings of the city around it.

Her vision was dimming, interrupted by bulbous, undulating multi-colored blobs, but still she tried to see her assaulter. All there was above her, however, was a dark, man-shaped thing dressed entirely in black, his face a shadow. Looking beyond his towering figure, she saw a few low hills and a bridge over a slight gulley. She felt herself dragged beneath it.

She tried to dig her heels into the ground, but as plush as the natural green carpeting was, it was not loose enough to let her heels sink into the dirt beneath. She bucked and pulled against the astonishingly painful grips about her neck and head, but it didn’t slow her assaulter. He continued to pull strongly, evenly, while Lisa flopped behind him like a fish on a hook.

Exhausted, horror-stricken, Lisa finally was forced to relax because of her body’s lack of oxygen. She drooped in her assaulter’s grip, the back of her barely conscious mind hoping that might get him to lighten up on his death grip. But even as she thought this, the man

continued to haul her toward the darkness of the bridge's underside.

Her eyes blinked, her fingers still at her throat, her legs straight out. As a haze drifted down over her eyesight, she could see off to the side where the tree line started. And coming from behind that tree fence was the young cop she had meant to torment.

The sight of him sent a wave of adrenalin smashing up against the shore of her mind, clearing away the encroaching unconsciousness. Accompanying that was a bone-shaking start that sent a last, furious shock throughout her entire body. To both her and her assaulter's surprise, the necklace snapped open in his hand, dropping Lisa's head to the ground.

Air seemed to fill her entire skull, the life-giving stuff refreshing her unlike any drug she ever tried. She felt a high, she had never experienced. A high of reprieved life. She looked back at the start of the tree line, fully expecting to see the cop come running to her aid. Instead, she saw that the officer wasn't even looking her way. He was completely oblivious to her predicament.

Still weak, she rolled over onto her back, the oxygen collecting in her torn throat. She could feel it building up for a trumpeting shout that would rival even the bay's foghorns. She started to sit up and shout just as her assaulter's fist came coursing down out of the night.

It had the look and effect of a meteor. The dark round hunk of flesh, bone, and muscle smashed into the lower part of her face with a battering ram's force. She felt a cracking burst and could have sworn she saw a flash in front of her eyes, as if the punch were captured in a comic book illustration.

Its effect amazed her. Beside the fact that her head snapped back, she was astonished that she could not scream. The shock and pain had paralyzed her. She found herself on her elbows, on her back, looking up at the sky, the bottom half of her face mashed, and the warm wet feel of liquid flowing from her mouth.

She blinked, her mouth working. Seconds later, she realized she could still talk and there was still a chance of escape. Her spent wind was collected again with a deep exhalation and again her mouth stayed open. Then the fist rocketed down again.

As she lay somewhere between consciousness and unconsciousness, the soft grass seemed to take on a firmer substance—each blade becoming as hard and annoying as a dull pin. This completed the aura of pain wafting across and through her. Dimly, she could understand that the assaulter was pulling her toward the bridge's underside again. As she was dragged, the hard grass blades scraped across her back like picks. She was surprised that they didn't send out a musical tone as

she drifted across them like fingers on a harp.

The only measure of true consciousness she experienced again was when her assaulter dragged her by the chin and hair over the bridged bluff and dropped her in a tiny, shallow creek, made up of the mist that had fallen during the day. Her hair seemed to suck up the moisture like the roots of a plant, her vision clearing enough to show her that the fog had thickened like a roof and four walls around them. The only thing that could signal the distant cop now was her voice.

Valiantly, bravely, she collected breath to try one more time even though she told herself it was hopeless. She was fully expecting her assaulter to stop her by covering her mouth or hitting her again, but she was beyond caring. In fact, she expected anything but what he actually did.

As soon as she had been dragged into the bushes, she could only think of one thing: rape. She was totally convinced that she had been captured so her assaulter could abuse her in that way. She held no misconceptions of her own attractiveness. She was very pretty with a very good body. Something deep inside her ego told her that it would be ridiculous for this beast to waste that.

It was a horrible, degrading thought to die on. As her mind signaled her voice to work, something bigger, harder, and faster swung down. It was the metal pan of a small, dark green shovel. The kind that folded up; the kind they used in the military.

It smashed across her face with devastating effect. Her head slammed down. She could feel it sinking in the wet ground. She could feel her nasal bones breaking and her nostrils spreading across her face. She could feel her lips split. Her vision disappeared under a layer of exploding darkness. The blood spread across her visage like a mask. She could feel her skull give way partially and her face cave in.

Before she died, she saw her attacker's face clearly. It was a young face with dark hair and prominent cheek bones. Just below his long nose was a brown mustache. It was the face of the policeman she thought she saw on the other side of the trees.

Her mashed face rolled over to the side, her streaming blood moving in that direction. As it covered her blinking eyes, she saw that the faraway figure's arm was out. He wasn't the policeman at all, but a man in a blue suit walking his dog. The policeman was above her with a small, folding military shovel.

She felt herself being dragged deeper under the bridge, where two more hands collected her legs and pulled her into complete darkness. She died just as she saw that the second figure was Kim Byrnes. She fell into the bottomless pit just as it began to rain.

“Come on,” said Lisa Patterson’s lover. “Let’s do it and put her with all the others.”

Trevor Samuels hated his dog, hated to take it for walks, and this morning he even hated San Francisco. The dog was a fox terrier, the walk was between the reservoir and John McLaren Park, and the morning was dreadful. Samuels kept a firm grip on the frisky canine’s leash and the hilt of the cheap black umbrella as he tried to keep his balance in the rain.

It was practically a torrential downpour compared with what he was used to. A fastidious man who had spent his entire life in the city, Samuel was used to minor downpours only deep in the winter months. According to his almanac, the wet was only supposed to come between November and April. But this September was one of the most rainy in history.

In honor of the freakish weather, he had stopped on the way to work to buy a Woolworth’s Special—a small, black umbrella made of thin metal and thin fabric. It had done fine for him for about five days, then the edges began to fray, the opening mechanism began to catch, and the supports began to give way. With the rain coming down in pounding sheets it was practically no help to him at all this morning.

The dog, on the other hand, seemed to think that the unseasonal rainfall was a cue to go crazy. He ran up and down the inclines like a pup possessed, champing at the circular neck bit. In no mood for this kind of levity, Trevor jerked irritably on the leash, giving himself a certain sadistic satisfaction but unable to diminish his pet’s enthusiasm.

“That’s it,” Samuels muttered miserably. “That’s all the chance you get,” he told the dog. “We’re not out here for fun, damn it.”

He dug his heels in and pulled the dog back, trying to turn around. The animal would have none of it. At that moment, a gust of wind pushed by, catching the weak underside of the umbrella and turning half of it inside out.

The rain splashed on the side of Samuel’s face and the umbrella tried to leap out of his hand. Swearing, the middle-aged man brought up his other hand to steady the umbrella, only to have the terrier pull the leashed hand back.

“Damn it!” Samuels yelled, jerking the hand back, causing the dog to choke. “Stop pulling on me, you stupid dog.”

But the dog would still have none of it. He continued to exert pressure on the leash, trying to continue forward. “Jesus H. Christ!”

Samuels barked, only to have the dog do the same. “Jesus,” he repeated, turning in place, trying to cover up from the bombarding water.

As he twisted and turned, his right foot smacked into a patch of slick mud, causing his shoe to slide. “Christ!” he screamed, falling.

He slammed face first into the sodden ground, both the umbrella handle and the leash flying out of his hands. The umbrella was caught in the wind and went rolling off in one direction while the freed dog went galloping off in the other.

“Oh Jesus,” Samuels breathed, pushing himself out of the muck, looking at his dirt covered coat and shirt front. “Oh Christ,” he concluded, feeling the rain pounding down hard on his sparse hair. Only after he took an assessment of his ruined suit did he fully realize that the dog had gone running off for parts unknown.

Getting up and trotting in the direction the canine had disappeared, Samuels tried to spot his pet in the early morning greyness. “Oscar!” he called. “Oscar, get back here you bad dog!” The name was his little joke. Being as fastidious as Felix Ungar in “The Odd Couple” it was natural that he would name his crazy, disruptive pet Oscar Madison.

“Oscar, you get back here this minute!” Samuels shouted miserably. In the distance he could hear the terrier barking in reply. He followed the sound, carefully navigating the treacherously soaked ground. He kept moving until he came to the lip of a steep hill—an incline that had been practically turned into a mud waterfall by the rain.

“Oscar?” he called out in trepidation. The barking reply came from the very bottom of the valley, just as he had feared. “You get up here this instant!” the man demanded, as if expecting the dog to comply. He stood and waited, getting no further reply.

“You hear me?” he asked, when the dog did not appear after a few seconds. Again, the dog did not seem to come running or bark back. “Oscar, are you crazy or something?” he demanded of the gloom more than anything else. “It’s terrible out here. I’m getting soaked! Please, baby, let’s go home and I’ll give you a nice Milk Bone.”

Just as he finished speaking, he saw the dim outline of the terrier tortuously making its way back up the gooey hill.

“That’s the boy,” Samuels urged him on. “Come to Poppa now so we can get out of this awful rain. Come on home so you can get a nice Liver Snap.” The words seemed to make the canine double its efforts.

The man’s inviting smile grew harder the closer the dog got, his teeth clamping down on each other and his lips curling back.

“Come on, Oscar, that’s the baby. You can do it. Just a couple of

feet more. That's the way." As the terrier got closer, Samuels could see that he had changed from his greyish-white color to a mud-dark brown.

In addition, he labored up the cliff-like hill with something dark and chunky between his teeth. Good God, Samuels thought, the dumb dog put me through this hell for a bone. It had smelled the appetizing tid-bit from way off and went right for it like a heat-seeking missile. By God, he'd have the dog's hide for this.

Samuels expectantly waited for Oscar to appear before him, his hand already raised. He started in on him verbally the moment his head poked up above the hill's lip,

"Why, you miserable little . . ." He bent down to deliver the first slap when he froze.

Once out of the sliding muck, the rain began to wash the mud away from both the dog and what it held in its teeth. As Samuels watched, the brown, gritty coating slid away to reveal a familiar bone structure.

Oscar had a skull in his teeth. A skull minus the jaw bone and bottom teeth. A skull with pieces of flesh, muscle and hair still stuck to it. A human skull.

CHAPTER

Three

Inspector Harry Callahan of the San Francisco Homicide Department didn't like standing in torrential rain any more than Trevor Samuels did. But at least he was doing a job—his job, the kind of thing he knew how to do best.

At times like this, however, he couldn't help thinking that maybe he could learn another trade just as well, real fast. While it was always a great pleasure to get a piece of murdering scum off the street, it was never as easy as simply walking up and politely requesting it to leave the road right away. Harry had never met a murdering piece of scum who responded by saying, "Sure, why didn't you ask sooner?"

No, they didn't get to be considered murdering scum by being nice and Callahan didn't get the nickname "Dirty Harry" by being polite. He got it by being relentless, determined, and by leaving as little to the imagination as possible. When Harry waded into the fray, one could be sure of one thing. The fray was going to be faced with one big hunk of well-armed policeman who carried enough firepower to put down a Third World revolution.

Take the Brown Bender investigation for example. The hulking, impeccably tailored black man had been spotted coming into town by Bill MacKenzie, the ex-cop who now ran the burger concession out at the airport. And even MacKenzie knew—especially MacKenzie—that when the Bender hit town, someone's number was definitely up.

The hamburger man specialized in chili and bloodcurdling stories; both strong enough to make your hair and your stomach roll over and play dead. In his repetoire of appetite suppressing yarns were several tales of gruesome woe that were attributed to the skills of master hitman Mister Brown Bender. Nothing could be proved, of course—Bender was too big and too slick, but the various arrests and trials had taken their monetary toll. He was now in need of some fast bread.

And when somebody like the Bender needed cash fast, he might be setting himself up for a first mistake. So, before the big man got his luggage, MacKenzie had already called inspector number seventy-one, who collected his fat Irish partner, and was already filibustering his lieutenant for some immediate surveillance duty. So Harry Callahan and Patrick "Fatso" Devlin found themselves on the trail of Brown

Bender.

Up until then, Bender had prided himself at being able to shake any tail with his street-smart senses, but he hadn't knocked thick heads with Harry before. Callahan wasn't the kind to depend on tried and true methods as taught in the Police Academy. He let experience show the way.

Having finally tracked the black hitman to his hotel—the Commodore International on Sutter Street—Callahan got some bugging equipment from the neighborhood electronics dealer, Sid Kleinman, and installed it while Bender was out and Devlin was eating lunch. That was why Paddy was called "Fatso" and Harry was called "Dirty."

"You can't use anything you hear in a court of law," Devlin reminded him when Harry rejoined his partner in a room in the building next door.

"I'm not collecting evidence," Harry replied. "I'm just getting information."

"The D.A. would come down on you like the Hindenburg if he knew you were doing this," Fatso went on apathetically.

"I'm not interested in making a case for Rothko," Harry countered. "I just want to know what I can expect of the Bender. Besides," he mused, turning to his partner, who was still stuffing corned beef into his face. "Who's going to tell him?"

His mouth full, Devlin looked up, made a wide, cheeky smile and put an onion ring over his head to serve as a halo. "Nobody here but us kosher chickens, boss," he said.

So it was that Harry saw Bender pass by a man in Lafayette Park who expertly handed off an envelope to him. Harry stuck with the hitman while sending Devlin after the messenger. The partners reconnoitered after the assassin returned to his hotel digs, and Devlin reported.

"High class stock boy for investment firm."

"Who owns it?" Harry asked.

"Already called it in and got the word," Devlin replied. "Theodore Comstock, alias Teddy Tuccio."

Callahan listened with satisfaction. When somebody of Bender's tightly wound egotism joined forces with someone of Tuccio's slimey stupidity, sparks were destined to fly.

"That little hood is certainly coming up in the world, isn't he?" Harry suggested.

Fatso shook his head sadly while returning to his post at the

window overlooking the Commodore's entrance. " 'Tis a pity when one has to sink so low to be so rotten," he said in a soft brogue. "Who do you suppose he wants to be rid of?"

"Anybody in his way," Harry replied, returning his attention to the earphones and tape recorder.

"Bender must be pretty desperate to take money from a rat like Tuccio," Devlin figured.

"If I know our little Teddy," Callahan said, "Bender probably hasn't gotten the money yet. He'll keep the hitman on the string for as long as he can get away with it."

A light flashed on the bugging console indicating the phone in Bender's room was ringing. Brown Bender sounded incredulous when he picked up the receiver and heard the voice of "Theodore Comstock" on the other end.

"I can't get you the money yet," Tuccio said.

"What?" Bender boomed. "Are you crazy, man?"

"Don't worry, don't worry," Tuccio said easily. "I've got an 'in' at the station. No tap has been set up at your hotel. If it had I'd know about it."

Callahan smiled.

"Hey, honkey, I don't much care about your 'ins.' Nobody calls Brown Bender and says they can't pay. I can make all your 'ins' 'outs.' You understand me, fool?"

The hitman sounded plenty mad, Harry thought. He didn't return to the vernacular of the Negro streets unless he was sufficiently riled.

"Listen, be cool," Tuccio said with conviction. "That's the only reason I'm calling personally, you see? I'm real busy with this deal I'm making, OK, so I just can't make the appointment we set up initially. But don't worry. I put an anti-bugging device on this end and called you to set up another meeting, right?"

Callahan shook his head in disbelief. Tuccio had been lying so long he wouldn't have known the truth if it came up and put its fist through his face.

"You just tell me where and when," the hitman growled threateningly.

"Seven A.M. at the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market," the businessman said. "Between the Southern Freeway and the railroad tracks near the corner of Oakdale and Silver Avenue, OK?"

"I'll be there," Bender said. "You just make sure you're there too, and with the money. I don't let anybody pull something like this on

me twice."

Brown Bender was a monster who had bashed his way out of his middle-class roots to buy as much repectability as he could while he graduated from running suburban numbers to fixing high school, then college, then professional ballgames. Discovering that he was his own best enforcer, Bender, named for both his father's and mother's families—Brown and Bender—went to where the real money was: professional assassination.

Tuccio, on the other hand, had lied and cheated his way to an insecure standing in the business world by combining an innate cunning with a low I.Q. While he could think of brilliantly vicious cons, he usually screwed himself during the implementation. But the one thing he was best at was putting up a slick front. The man could talk with the best of them. He could convince anyone that he was on the level, then disappear when things fell apart.

Harry only hoped that the con wasn't trying to kid Bender or else this time he had bitten off more than he could chew. Bender would have little trouble finding him and then emptying what little Tuccio had between his ears through his nose. But it was hardly concern for Tuccio that made Callahan hopeful. He just wanted to be there when one known criminal gave money to another. At that point, they could both be taken in and Tuccio might just be made spineless enough to try and save his hide.

Between the rain and the time of day, the Produce Market was fairly quiet. Most of its business occurred between four and six in the morning when the restaurant representatives showed up to cart off vegetables and fruit. Any buyer who'd normally be left at this time was chased away by the inclement weather. Although the market stalls had ceilings, most of them were made of canvas and light wood, which hardly protected the client from a rainfall as heavy as this.

About the only ones left were the sellers themselves, putting away their wares and shutting down for the day. They and at least two cautious, rain-soaked cops. They were enough, however. Even without the various buyers, the marketplace was still abuzz with activity. Between the bosses pulling down their awnings and the helpers loading the leftover produce onto trucks with handheld and crane-like baskets and hooks, there was enough colorful movement to make Fatso dizzy.

"Geez," he said, looking up at the drain pipe which was intermittently dousing him when the water overflowed. "Why the hell didn't we stay in the car, Harry?"

“Because the car is on the other side of the market,” Callahan told him, his back flat against the wall of one of the shops which was first to close up. “And that’s where Bender and Tuccio will probably be coming in. And we’d scare them off if they saw us.”

“Wow,” Devlin breathed with feigned awe. “You think of everything, Sherlock.”

Harry smirked, then glanced around the corner to get a good look at the parking lot. Two burly white men in three-piece suits sauntered into the marketplace. “This looks like it,” Harry warned his partner. He cocked his head in the duo’s direction. “Tuccio’s advance guard.”

Devlin gave a low, mock groan. “Why couldn’t we have called in the cavalry on this one, Harry? Or at least some backup troops?” Callahan didn’t bother answering.

They had had nothing in the way of leads except an illegally overheard phone call. If they had tipped their hand to anybody, questions would have been asked. As it was, they would “just happen to be at the right place at the right time thanks to their incredible shadowing techniques.”

As the Inspector watched, the two suited men drifted down the main walkway of the market, which was littered with rejected produce. The rain had done a lot to keep the stench of rotting food from being overpowering, but it couldn’t completely wash away the smell. The duo stopped in the middle of the market and nodded back the way they had come. Appearing near the first stall was Tuccio himself, his gaunt face framed by thin, greasy grey hair sticking out of a nearly new London Fog trench-coat. In his hand, he carried a sumptuous dark red leather attaché case.

As he neared his two bodyguards, another figure detached itself from inside one of the center booths. Coming out from behind two standing crates of nuts was a neatly dressed black man, who stood taller than any of the Caucasians present. He cut a more sophisticated figure as well, wearing dark slacks, a turtleneck and a leather coat. He slipped out between two hanging canvas flaps which made up the side wall and approached the trio.

“Let’s have it,” he demanded, pointing to the briefcase.

“Whatever you say,” Callahan said under his breath. He pulled out his six and a half inch Smith and Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum and held it up near his head. Its blue steel gleamed in the hazy morning light.

“Hey, Harry,” Devlin warned, seeing the gun. “You don’t want to spook them.”

“Bender’s been linked to at least a dozen killings,” Callahan

whispered back. “If he decides he wants to shoot his way out of here, would you rather your gun be inside your coat or inside your hand?”

To respond, Devlin pulled his own .357 snubnose out of its waist holster.

“Let’s see if we can soothe them with a diplomatic approach,” the Inspector suggested.

He moved out from his hiding place just as both Tuccio’s and Bender’s fingers were wrapped around the case’s handle.

“Excuse me,” Harry said pleasantly. “Does anyone here know the time?”

“Fuck!” Bender bellowed. “This is a set-up!”

As soon as the big black man barked, Tuccio jumped back, the briefcase being pulled out of the hitman’s grip. The smaller conman almost fell into Fatso, causing him to drop the leather bag. The briefcase skittered to the floor and spun in place. Its fall was a signal for the others to start going for their guns. Callahan stopped them cold.

“And this,” said Harry, raising his weapon, “is a .44 Magnum. At this range, it could blow your head clean off. So, unless you’re feeling real lucky, let’s just stay real calm.”

He looked from one man to the next, the long open barrel of the .44 looking like a tunnel leading straight to hell. Each white man dropped his hand from the strike zones of their coats.

Bender wasn’t so easily cowed. His hand stayed inside his leather jacket, where Harry imagined his big fingers were already wrapped around the grip of a heavy automatic. Judging from the size of his well-cut coat, Bender could be carrying anything from a target .22 to a sawed-off shotgun.

“So what do you say, punk?” Harry asked pointedly, the Magnum aimed directly between the black man’s angry eyes. “Do you feel lucky?”

The hitman was angry, but he wasn’t stupid. Certainly not stupid enough to think he could outdraw a .44 which was already pointed at the bridge of his nose. If he thought there might be a chance that Harry’s bluff was worse than his bite, he still might, have tried something, but there was no mistaking Callahan’s expression. Here was a cop who wasn’t reluctant to use ammunition. Harry would shoot first and fill out the report in triplicate later.

Slowly, so very slowly, Bender’s fingers released the edge of his shoulder-holstered weapon and let his hand drift down to his side.

Harry heard Devlin audibly relax by his side. He too had to admit a

certain relief inside himself. After all the firefights he had found himself in and all the blood he had been forced to spill, it was nice to think that just once he might be able to bring in all four killers without a shot being fired.

But as soon as that concept was conceived, the possibility was eliminated. Harry was just about to wade into the quartet, when the Produce Market was shattered from behind. The two cops felt the disruption behind them at the same time they heard the whomping crash.

Callahan looked over his shoulder to see a big Lincoln Continental plowing into the first two booths at the edge of the marketplace.

The Ford's wide shiny grill looked like gritted teeth and its headlights were like two burning sets of angry eyes. It smashed its face into the wood and canvas structures, grinding them under the steel belted radials like a mulch mower. Workers scattered before it and in its wake, leaving their wares to be splattered in a ring around the metal monster.

So much for an easy arrest. It must've been Tuccio's car, driven by a dedicated chauffeur who saw his boss's trouble and was riding to the rescue. If Harry had been him, he would've taken the opportunity to fold his tent and sneak into the night in search of a new boss, but crud like Tuccio usually attracted even less sophisticated associates—the kind who saw a target painted on every man in uniform.

But Harry was not the driver. He was right in the chauffeur's sightlines, standing square in between the two blazing headlights. The car's appearance was enough to loosen the cops' hold on the others. They immediately pushed away from the sight, each pulling a gun from inside their jackets.

Bellowing over the roar of the Lincoln's engine, Bender produced a brutal looking .45 automatic and tried to blast not Harry, but Tuccio, where he stood.

"You tried to set me up!" he accused over the shattering explosion of the big gun.

Tuccio didn't hear any of it, but his attention was diverted from the approaching car long enough for him to see one of his bodyguards taking the slug that was meant for him. Bender was throwing himself backward over the counter of the shack he had emerged from even as he was firing, while the guard had been moving to protect his boss. Tuccio watched as the guard took the .45 slug in the left side of his chest, spinning him totally around as a stream of blood spit out of his breast and spread across his shirt.

The guard's own shiny .357 plated revolver skipped across the black

concrete floor before he fell heavily to his knees, then flopped onto his back, his arms wide, his head smacking sickeningly onto the hard ground cover. Tuccio stumbled back, giving Harry a fleeting clear shot at the retreating black man.

Ignoring the oncoming car, Harry shouted “Stop!” and set the .44’s sights on the dropping Bender. He pulled the trigger just as Tuccio’s second guard got in the way. The man had been following his fallen partner, only to catch Harry’s bullet in the neck. Sure enough, just as Harry said, the high caliber slug was enough to rip his head right off at that range.

Tuccio was splattered by his second guard’s guts, which drove him back even faster. The second guard moved one step forward without his head, then did a perfect swan dive forward to slam atop his dead comrade.

“Harry, look out!” Callahan heard Devlin screaming from behind him. “Forget it, just get out of the way!”

He spun to see the market’s booths being slammed aside by the Continental, which was practically on top of him. Devlin had scrambled aside as soon as it had appeared, while Tuccio and Bender had retreated far enough to be out of its way. Only Harry was in danger of its grinding wheels and battered grill.

Even if he had thrown himself to the side, it probably wouldn’t be far or fast enough to avoid being run down. And there certainly wasn’t any way to outrun the speeding monstrosity, so Harry charged forward to meet the car head on.

The unexpectedness of this motion caused Tuccio’s chauffeur to slam on the brakes, which sent the car skidding forward, its already gathered speed too great for it to stop. After two hard strides forward, Harry jumped up, his right foot hitting the car’s hood flat.

From there it seemed there was nothing left for the cop to do but keep barreling ahead, meeting the car’s windshield with his legs and somersaulting brutally across the rear of the auto, winding up a heap on the hard concrete behind. The car screeched forward, twisting to the side, but once Harry had hopped on, he seemed to disappear.

The driver heard no nasty slamming across his roof and no sickening splat behind. Getting the skidding car under control, he looked bewilderedly around. The Inspector was nowhere in sight. It was possible the chauffeur thought that the cop had been thrown out of range.

The three men outside the car saw what had happened, Harry had hopped up to the auto’s hood and vaulted from there to a hanging hook above the speeding vehicle. Harry pulled himself up, his knees

bent, just above the car's roof, as the vehicle skidded to the side just beneath his shoes.

As soon as it passed, Harry let go of the hook. It was attached to a spring controlled pulley unit, so that it held Harry high enough long enough before drooping slightly. It now hung like a giant fishing pole from heaven. Callahan hit the floor with both feet, kept falling forward and somersaulted across the floor away from Tuccio and Bender.

The two criminals were keeping each other busy. Tuccio was on one side of the collapsed shack the hitman had retreated to, his own gun out, a sleek esoteric looking Heckler and Koch 9mm Automatic. With it, he was trying to plug Bender before the hitman was able to peg him. Fatso, in the meantime, had been unable to sight either of them because of the passing car.

Harry had rolled to one knee when Tuccio's fourth rapidly fired bullet happened to catch Bender in the side as the dazed man was pulling himself out of the booth's rubble. It was obvious that the debris from the car's collision with the shed had stunned the big man, but was far from enough to knock him down for the count. Even the 9mm bullet wasn't enough to do that.

Bender took the bullet with a grimace, the same way many people took allergy shots. He twisted in the direction the bullet had come from and started blasting .45 rounds. But he was firing blind and Tuccio knew it. The bullets splattered into the ground in front and to the right of the businessman as he continued to pump lead into Bender's torso.

The next 9mm bullet went into the hitman's left shoulder, making Bender react as if to a punch. One shattered his jaw, turning the lower half of his face into a bloody mass of pulpy muscle and jagged bone. If the bullet had hit him straight on, he'd have been dead. As it came across his profile, however, it merely tore off his chin.

Bender was unable to keep upright after that. He fell to his right, making Tuccio's next round miss. He fell heavily, his own gun silent. Spooked by his own ability to stop a man he was certain was going to kill him, Tuccio ran around the back of the destroyed booth toward the idling car, pulling the trigger of his now empty automatic as he went.

From that angle, Harry was unable to hit the crook himself, so he scrambled to his feet to give chase. As he raced forward, Bender turned slowly over, like a bear lazily rolling in the noon sun. He fell onto his back, his gun hand dropping perpendicular to his body. His head drooped. Drifting slowly, looking as if he were simply rolling

over in bed.

But Bender wasn't one to go out like that. Even Harry could see that the .45 was raised off the ground at a slight angle. Bender's finger tightened and the big automatic boomed, the speeding bullet smashing through the middle of Tuccio's back, exploding out his stomach just above his sternum.

Some of Tuccio's middle made it to the car before he did. It splashed against the grill and hood, glowing in the hot white of the headlights. It started to dry immediately from the engine's heat, losing its lustre just as Tuccio collapsed across its front. The crook's eyes—gleaming first with surprised life then lost all their illumination. He died as he slowly slid across the grill to the ground.

Again it was just Callahan and the car; facing each other in a sort of perverted version of *High Noon*. Pressing his foot down on the gas pedal, he sent the big auto barreling across the body of its dead owner. Tuccio bounced twice beneath the spinning wheels, hunks of him being spit out of several orifices.

Harry wasn't going to stand on ceremony. The driver had had his chance twice before and as far as Callahan was concerned, no more Mr. Nice Guy. He planted his feet apart and blasted away at the oncoming car.

The first bullet was too low, breaking through the grill and damaging the engine block, The second shot smashed the windshield from the center outward, blinding the chauffeur with shattered glass. But the bullet itself had missed him. The third bullet caught him right in the middle of his head, pinning him back against the seat. But since the lead had hit him straight on and the seat was backstopping him, there was nowhere for him to go. His corpse remained upright, his mind's last command keeping his hands frozen to the wheel.

Both Harry and Fatso fired. There was no way of knowing which bullet had the greater effect since both hit their target at once, but it hardly made a lot of difference either way. Harry's fourth bullet exploded the left front tire while Devlin's round crashed through the side window and into the dead driver's shoulder.

The force of the .357 slug pushed the chauffeur's corpse over, making him turn the wheel. The ruined tire gave way, making the car spin sideways. Harry had just enough time to throw himself to his left as the car went sweeping by, neatly clipping the .44 out of Callahan's hand.

The operation couldn't have been more precise. Since Harry was somersaulting forward, his hands wound up behind him as he fell on his back. As the Lincoln's bumper shot past, it just tapped the end of

the Magnum's barrel hard enough to pull it out of Harry's grip. The car slid between where Harry lay and Fatso crouched, while the .44 flew into a crate of overripe oranges.

The Continental smashed into another row of booths behind the two rows it had leveled initially. It kept going this time, until there was nothing between it and the edge of the marketplace. Since the place was nothing more than a collection of booths beneath a tent-like awning held in place by thin metal beams, there was no wall to stop the barreling Continental. It vaulted off an asphalt embankment and landed on its nose halfway down the incline. Upside down it lay on the edge of the railroad tracks.

It rocked painfully back and forth, the metal groaning and the hot underside steaming and sizzling in the hard morning rain. On his knees, Callahan watched it reach its resting place then slowly rose to his feet.

"I'll go check it," Devlin offered. His superior nodded, so the round cop trotted off toward the wreckage.

Harry turned back to see Brown Bender walking toward him, his .45 shakily pointed at his waist.

CHAPTER

Four

The hitman had taken three 9mm bullets fired at close range and was carrying at least two of them inside his body. But still, the giant was pulling himself toward Harry, the heavy weapon aimed accurately.

Callahan didn't take his eyes off Bender. Maybe Devlin was still close enough to do some good. Harry wasn't about to turn or call his name. That would be Bender's cue to start shooting. As it was, the wounded killer was only moving closer to insure his shot. He wanted the Inspector dead.

Thinking about the hitman's wounds, Harry figured the assassin would not only be strong enough to kill him, but perhaps even strong enough to live on afterwards. Even with slugs in his side and shoulder, and the shattered bottom of his face dripping crimson sludge, he might conceivably be brought back to a semblance of health while Harry deteriorated in the cold ground should his bullet find its mark.

Harry carefully used his peripheral vision to see what immediate chances were left him. Slowly, carefully, he started moving to the side. Bender was beyond expressing anything on his visage, but if he still had a mouth, Callahan was fairly certain that he perceived a smile. As far as the hitman was concerned, Harry was the cornered mouse while he was the fat cat.

Harry slowly kept skittering to the side and Bender kept pace with him. Callahan watched the .45 rise just as slowly, judging where the hitman would stop and pull the trigger. The weakened black man was relying on his momentum to keep him going. If Harry interrupted that momentum, it might throw the guy completely off.

As suddenly as Harry started moving, he stopped. Bender stopped as well, the gun centering on Callahan's chest. But just as it was coming up, Harry screamed, leaping to the side and grabbing the hanging hook he had used to swing over the car. He pulled it down and threw it forward just as Bender fired.

The hitman looked down as he tried to move away, but to his surprise he found himself standing amid a squashed crateload of bananas. Whether it was the fear of falling or simply that he was too weak to move, Bender remained motionless as the hook slammed into his chest.

The heavy hook should have knocked the hitman over and that would have been enough for Callahan to disarm him. But as fate would have it, Bender's knees buckled just as the hook got close. The surprisingly sharp point dug in just under his rib cage and the black man's massive weight did the rest. The hook sunk all the way into his chest. The hook slid back to Harry, dragging Bender with it on his knees.

* * *

Devlin came back at the first shout. He slowed from a run to a casual walk when he saw what was on the end of the hook. The round Irishman had stopped being shocked at Harry's exploits quite some time ago. He said a few "Hail Marys" and "Our Fathers" to himself whenever he emerged from another Dirty Harry operation with his form intact. He was the only partner Callahan ever had who managed to do so for any length of time.

Fanducci, the first, Smith, the fourth, and Moore, the sixth, had all been killed. Deitzick, Gonsales, and DiGeorgio, the second, third, and fifth, respectively, had all come very close to buying it. Only Devlin, the man who filled in the empty space at Callahan's side when Headquarters had nobody else to sit in what was jokingly referred to as the suicide seat in Harry's patrol car, had never filed for sick pay.

"You all right, Harry?" he asked with a catch in his voice, unable to swallow.

Callahan considered the dead hitman, then glanced around at the other corpses. Like magnets pulled to the sight, the market workers began to drift back to the scene, pointing and mumbling in amazement and disgust.

"Yeah," he said quietly to Devlin. "I'm going to call somebody to clean it up."

On the way back to the green hulk the Justice Department supplied him with, Harry retrieved his gun from the depths of the stinking fruit crate. It came out reluctantly, dripping noxious citrus ooze.

"Shit," Harry said, holding it away from him gingerly by the bottom of the butt.

The police car was unmarked. Otherwise the dark green exterior was beaten and battered about as much as Harry. They both had rough skin and a good variety of scars to show where they had been. Otherwise they both ran well and were dependable in a fix.

As Harry got close, letting the rain wash the dirt from his face and the fruit juice from his gun, he heard the radio burbling from inside the closed window. He quickly opened the door, threw the gun on the

seat and sat behind the wheel.

“Inspector Seventy-one,” the crackling male voice on the speaker intoned. “Inspector Seventy-one, come in please.”

“Inspector Seventy-one,” Harry answered, pulling the mike up to his lips and hitting the Talk button.

“Where the hell have you been, Harry?” the less than professional voice on the radio continued.

Callahan thought about it for a second, then replied, “Fishing, Reineke. Been fishing.”

“Catch anything?”

“In a manner of speaking,” Harry answered. “But nothing I’d stuff and hang on the wall. Get a mop-up team out to the W.P.M. right away. They can skin and debone it if they like.”

Reineke didn’t have to ask details. Harry was the proverbial bull in the china shop. As far as HQ was concerned, he should be assigned a permanent sweeper to clean up the carnage he always seemed to leave in his wake.

“You’re a disgusting man, Inspector,” Reineke said with humor. “How can you live with yourself?”

“And you’re a Sergeant bucking for demotion,” Harry retorted tiredly. “What the hell do you want?”

“It’s not me, Harry. It’s McKay. He’s been burning everybody’s butt at both ends for close to an hour now. It got so bad that the Lieutenant put me in charge of finding you. The regular radio personnel gave up after more than a half-hour.”

Harry was intrigued. Ever since the “Enforcer” fiasco which left Kate Moore dead on Alcatraz Island, Callahan and McKay both had been very careful to steer clear of each other. And while they had worked together since, in a manner of speaking, it was only with the greatest of reluctance.

“What does he want? To explain this morning’s ‘Hagar the Horrible’ comic strip?”

“Your guess is as good as mine, Harry. Our only instructions were to send you down to McClaren Park.”

That wasn’t so bad. The park was less than two miles from the market. “Where in the park?” Harry asked. “The place is more than a mile long.”

“The northeast corner,” the homicide sergeant said. “Near the reservoir. He says you can’t miss it. The place is crawling with uniforms and medicos.”

Sounded like something big all right. At least all the coroners wouldn't have to go very far themselves to examine the mess Harry had at the market. "OK," Harry told the sergeant. "Thanks."

"My pleasure, Inspector," Reineke said with a flourish. "Having done my duty, I can now get back to my glamorous post, doing the thrilling job I always wanted to do: making out a report on a dead wino found on the Embarcadero."

Callahan snorted. He only wished his own morning was as uneventful. "Sergeant," he said, "about your earlier question concerning how I live with myself . . . ?"

"Yeah?" Reineke drawled. "What about it, Harry?"

"It's a rotten job, but somebody's got to do it," the Inspector said flatly.

"Yeah," Reineke repeated. "I know what you mean, Inspector. I know what you mean." They both considered their dehumanizing lot for a second, then got back to the matter at hand.

"Inspector Seventy-one, over and out."

"Keep dry, Harry."

Reineke was right about one thing. They couldn't miss it. All roads leading to and from the park had been blocked and the entire area was awash with blue uniforms covered with yellow, orange, and black rain slickers. The sun-streaked sky was colored with the flashing blue, white, and red turrets of a small fleet of patrol cars.

Flashing their badges numerous times to make their way through the roadblocks, Devlin and Callahan finally made it to the core. Even so, Harry still had to park the car and walk past at least a half-dozen other vehicles to get to the top of a muddy incline which was lined with police officials.

He slipped into the line, practically unnoticed, since he was wearing the same nondescript light brown raincoat all the other plainclothed cops were wearing. The only difference between him and the others was that he wasn't wearing a hat—letting the still heavy rain beat down on his head like drumming fingers.

All the men in tan raincoats were standing at the top of the hill, unable and probably unwilling to help with the project occupying the many struggling medical officials at the bottom. Even as Harry watched, a team of interns were pulling the decomposing remnants of a corpse from its sticky makeshift grave.

As he looked around, he saw other medical units piecing another body back together, digging new holes in the hillside and loading the

bones into a variety of waiting ambulances. Just as he was taking that in, an umbrella was opened behind him and held over his head. He turned to see forensic labman Walter White standing beside him, his black hand on the umbrella handle.

"McLaren Park 'is melting in the dark,' " Harry said.

"They've been digging them out at the rate of one almost every five minutes," the young black doctor informed him while looking down at the excavation site. "We've got more than a half-dozen now."

"A half-dozen what?"

White continued, "The decomposition is bad, but the victims were also beaten either before or after death. Even so, there's no mistaking it. All the corpses are women, Harry."

Callahan grimaced, pushing a long exhalation of air through his nose. "Shit," he said for the second time that morning. "Anything else?"

"All different shapes, all different sizes," White mused with sing-song consideration. "By the looks of it, all different ages. They were buried at different times over the last few years though. That much is clear by the rate of decomposition on each body. Won't know much else for sure until we get them back to the lab."

Harry leaned over and looked up at the sky from under the umbrella's lip. The rain was still coming down in near torrential fashion. It had been falling like this, on and off, for days. Harry thought that this graveyard would not have been discovered had it not been for the monsoon-like downpour. Judging from San Francisco's usual rainfall, this cemetery could have remained undiscovered forever.

"How recent was the latest victim?" Harry asked.

"A good six months at least," White shrugged. "This could be one of those psycho cemeteries, Harry. The bastard could have done all this without anyone knowing and skipped town months ago."

"And that's just what I want you to find out, Inspector," came another voice from behind the labman—stronger, higher, and less considerate than White's. Callahan recognized it immediately. It was Captain Winston McKay.

Harry turned to look down at the five-foot-eleven inch police officer, who had his neatly coiffed black hair under a Captain's rain-shielded hat. Behind him was a hulking sergeant carrying the additional protection of an umbrella. Harry said and did nothing, inspiring the smaller officer to continue.

"Nice of you to show up, Inspector," he said sarcastically. "Isn't it

proper protocol for a lesser ranking officer to salute his superior?"

"Only in the military," Callahan said, looking back to the corpse pit. "Otherwise it's just a matter of perspective."

"Perspective?" McKay echoed. "I don't know what you mean."

This time Harry looked at him. "One man's superior is another man's inferior," he explained.

McKay's lips vibrated and his fists clenched before he was able to bring up a retort. "You watch your mouth," he exploded. "I could bust you down to nothing!" All of a sudden, the men who had been working in the excavation were watching the Inspector and the Captain.

Aware of this, but indifferent to it, Callahan shrugged. "So bust me," he invited. "I don't need this. I could think of better things to do than play politics while dead women are being dragged out of the ground."

It was McKay who was not only aware of all the eyes on them, but was desperate to get the upper hand. "What could be more important than finding their killer?" he pompously demanded.

"What could be less important than talking to you about it?" Callahan countered quietly. Harry's insubordination was a calculated risk on two fronts. First, demotions had no meaning for him. He had thrown away his badge before, and after everything he had been through—and not just this morning—he really didn't care whether he was on the police force or not.

Second, he figured there had to be a good reason for McKay to ask for him personally. So if the Captain was hot for Harry's body, there had to be something mighty pressing behind it.

Callahan watched as McKay struggled to control himself. With an obvious effort, he managed to swallow his wrath and pull back his lips for a snake-like smile. His facial pyrotechnics only offered more proof to Callahan's theory that McKay was offering him the olive branch under duress.

"Oh no, Inspector," McKay responded with something approaching pleasure. "I'm not going to demote you. That would be too easy. Especially with all these witnesses." The captain motioned to all the other plain-clothesmen.

"No, Inspector," McKay continued. "I'm going to do something worse. I'm going to assign you to this case. Under me. I'm going to give you the responsibility of finding the murderer of these women. Under my direct orders. I'm going to bury you down there with them, Callahan. You're going to be up to your nose in rotting flesh. You're going to have to do so much legwork and so much research that you'll

have to put in for a new set of eyes and feet."

Harry well understood the threat. With the last victim being at least six months old, investigating would be like trying to travel back in time through Jello. The trail will have cooled and clues, let alone evidence, would be almost impossible to find. In fact, a major investigation would have to be launched just to discover who those corroding corpses were. And once that was done, their killer would be that much further away.

"What's the matter, Inspector?" McKay pressed. "Cat got your tongue? You can't think of some other insult all of a sudden? Come on, Callahan, I want to know what you think about that. Let everybody hear what Dirty Harry has to say on the subject."

He was about to say what he thought when Devlin suddenly appeared behind the captain. His tapping McKay on the shoulder at that moment was enough to surprise the officer forward. He accidentally bumped right into Harry with a choked gasp. Grimacing, Harry stepped back and put his hands on McKay's shoulders to keep the captain upright. Unfortunately, his right foot sunk into the mud on the edge of the incline, throwing the Inspector off balance.

Harry's hands left McKay's shoulders abruptly as he felt himself sinking in the goop and sliding over the hill's lip. He fell back slowly and rolled through the muck, the earth unable to hold his weight. He drifted down and finally came to rest midway between the medical workers and the police watchers.

He looked up to see Devlin and White looking down with concern while McKay was shaking with laughter. Disgusted, Harry pushed his hands into the mud to attempt to stand. Instead, he looked between his arms to see something shiny beginning to appear.

Looking closer as the water completely revealed it, he could see that it was an old-fashioned silver tube whistle—the kind that consisted of a simple mouthpiece and a thin, elegant tube. Wrapping his hand around it, he saw that a chain was connected to the other end. Harry pulled on the whistle and two chain strands appeared, each sinking into the mud in a "V" shape, the base attached to the whistle. Rising out of the stuff on the left side was a tight, metal knot. Harry looked at it closely, seeing that someone with great strength had tied the chain together so that it held. Whoever it was had to be strong to be able to tighten links the way others could tie shoelaces.

Harry could feel whatever was holding the chain down giving way. As he pulled harder, he saw a ruined face emerging, washed as it came by the rain. It was a woman's face, beaten until beauty had little meaning. But it was a fresh face. Harry could see that easily; he knew

his corpses. This one was less than a day old.

He held it up as the rain washed the mud from her head, finally revealing a shapely, naked torso, and a rich, full mane of brown hair. Then, as quickly as it had started the night before, the rain stopped.

CHAPTER

Five

The newspapers and television reporters were practically wallowing in it. It seemed to Harry that the anchor people could hardly contain their beaming smiles as they rattled off the rumors they had been able to barely substantiate so far. Harry heard it all on his black and white set with the coat hanger standing in for the broken antennae. As he changed clothes, showered and shaved in his third floor apartment, he corrected the report as the toothy local newsman went along.

"A scene of horror was uncovered today when the police discovered a burial ground on the side of Mount Douglas near John McLaren Park late last night . . ."

"Early this morning," Harry said aloud.

". . . At least a dozen bodies were dug up . . ."

"A half dozen."

". . . by Sheriff's officials . . ."

"The Justice Department medical staff."

". . . All the victims were women."

Callahan couldn't argue with him there. What he could disagree with was that the report was given at all. It was just what some poor girl needed on her way to work. While it might make her a little more careful, it certainly wouldn't illuminate the matter, which would lead to meaningless paranoia.

"For more on the story, let's go to Ted Burnett at McLaren Park . . . Ted?"

The picture quickly changed to that of a neatly dressed man picking up the morning newspaper outside his quaint cape house.

"Thank you, John," intoned another voice, although the speaker wasn't the man who held the paper. "Little did Trevor Samuels know that when he went out early this morning to walk his dog, that he would be walking right into the middle of a gruesome murder scene," the voice continued. "Samuels had always lived on this quiet residential street a few blocks from the park . . . seemingly an oasis from inner city violence . . . that is, until this morning."

The scene shifted to the face of a fat woman standing on her lawn in

a moo-moo and slippered feet with a microphone stuck in her face. The legend on the bottom of the screen read 'Mrs. Howard Fratellini' and below that, 'Neighbor.'

"We moved here to get away from all that stuff, you know," the audio caught her saying in mid-sentence. "We didn't like all that stuff so we came here for a little quiet."

"But that quiet was shattered today when Mr. Samuels slipped near the McLaren Reservoir, letting go of his pet's leash," the reporter continued, the camera looking over the guarded, cordoned-off area near the hill. "It wasn't only a lost dog he had to worry about. It was what the dog brought back clenched in its teeth. It was a skull . . . a human skull."

"It was a human skull," Harry saw Samuels say. "I couldn't believe it. A real skull. Well, you could've knocked me over with a feather, I was so surprised. Nothing like that ever happens around here."

" 'Nothing like that ever happens around here,' " Ted Burnett quoted ominously, now fully on camera in his tie and trenchcoat, holding the mike to his own chin. "Well, John, it looks like hoping is just not enough to keep the specter of violent crime away from any door in our city. And the major questions remain. Will the police be any more successful in finding these victims' killers than they have been with all the other unsolved murders so far this year? Will this Mortician Murderer strike again? Is there anyplace safe? Is anyone?"

Here the reporter paused ominously, then signed off. "Ted Burnett . . . Eyewitness Action News."

Harry went at the set from the bathroom. He just managed to keep himself from putting his leg through the picture tube as anchorman John continued with professional seriousness.

"Thank you, Ted. Violence against women is not new in the City by the Bay, but it seems as if it has reached epidemic proportions this year. For background on this story, here's Connie Baxter. Connie?"

It was impressive in its callous slickness. Callahan had to hand it to them. Not only had they stirred up terror and titillation, but they had also taken a swipe at alleged police inefficiency. Now the pretty, capable, dark-haired Baxter was sonorously reminding her sisters how dangerous it was out on the street as if she had no personal interest in the situation. Her voice was as clipped and reserved as though she were reading a recipe. In fact, someone later told Harry, she had returned to do a restaurant review further on in the broadcast.

"Yeah, guys," Harry told the TV screen as he turned it off. "And James Brady was killed during the Reagan assassination attempt."

Given his media-fueled state of mind, Callahan went right back to

the Justice building between the Skyway and the Southern Pacific station, ready to chew up and spit out anybody who got in his way. He left his green bomb at the curb and vaulted right toward the front steps. There were reporters on the stairs, outside the main doors, inside the lobby, and in front of the homicide department's door on the seventh floor.

They accosted almost everyone of note who came in, jostling for position, holding their cameras over their heads and using their microphones and tape recorders like electric prods. Every time an officer or politician appeared, they would crowd around him like bees to honey, forcing him to push his way through while their questions were thrown together in a shouted buzz.

They had just given the treatment to someone when Harry appeared. At first they turned on him expectantly, but when they recognized the face, they gave him plenty of room. Dirty Harry was well known to the veterans of the City Hall Beat, only they thought his nickname signified something other than his investigation techniques.

More than a half decade ago, when they sorely abused him during the "Scorpio Sniper" and the "Enforcer" cases, Callahan decided he wouldn't be seen in the papers or on the TV news again. So now, whenever a camera or mike is turned his way, all he does is make faces, obscene gestures, and swear grievously.

Someone could try to embarrass him by printing the goofy pictures, but he'd slap a suit on them which would bring their ethics in question. And a paper or network could lose its license on a question of ethics far faster than it could on almost anything but pornography.

Harry ran up the steps without interruption and just made it out the seventh floor elevator doors when a young photographer tried to catch him off-guard. Bringing the camera up to capture Callahan's serious expression on the way to room seven hundred and fifty, he shouted.

"Over here, Inspector!"

He saw Harry's head turn in his direction, so he quickly brought the Nikon up, a feeling of success in his head. He found himself looking through the viewfinder at a widely smiling Harry, whose middle finger was prominently in evidence.

He left them all behind the door of the homicide department. The world could be going to hell in a hand-basket—and judging by their caseload, it was—but very little changed within the walls of suite seven-fifty. It still smelled like a locker room and looked like the psychiatric ward of S.F. General Hospital. The major difference between it and the horror of the Vice Squad was that, there, the nuts were all the suspects; here, the cops were the crazies.

“Hey Harry!” he heard Reineke call. “I heard you had some blind date last night.”

Harry remembered the crushed horrid remnant of the girl he pulled out of the goo several hours earlier. “Yeah,” he replied to the Sergeant, “but she was still better looking than the dogs you take out.”

The squad’s basic insanity came from the fact that had the Mortician Murderer’s graveyard not been discovered, Harry still would have had plenty to occupy him. With violent deaths coming in at an average of two and a half a day, the whole force had to tread water just to keep the bends away.

And if one were foolish enough to ask how half a death a day could be reported, as one rookie did, Harry would be happy to show you, as he did the youngster—care of the chopped-up bodies in the morgue.

As he had put it at the time—“It isn’t always halves. Sometimes it’s thirds, or quarters; occasionally it’s even in fourteenths.” The rookie vomited as punctuation.

So Harry went to his plastic cubicle, flanked on three sides by other cubicles, thinking about how easily the men and the public became familiar with murderer’s adorable little nicknames. Albert DeSalvo was called the Boston Strangler. Then there was his buddy the Hillside Strangler. Then good old Son of Sam. Now there was the Mortician Murderer who not only killed his victims, but buried them as well. There was nothing new in terms of cute, quick monikers; the press had been coming up with nicknames for decades and the public had gone right along with it.

Just as Harry was lowering himself onto his well-worn seat behind his chipped wooden desk, Lieutenant Al Bressler came bustling into his office with his tie loosened and his shirtsleeves rolled up.

“About time you got here, Harry,” he said without rancor. “The mayor is breathing down the commissioner’s neck, the commissioner is putting the heat on the chief, and the chief is chewing up the desk in my office.”

“So what do you want from me, Lieutenant?” Callahan inquired, leaning back behind his own desk, “I’ve run out of Tums.”

“Jesus, Harry, didn’t you know? The chief himself put you on this case. He’s been waiting for some kind of action since early this morning.”

The inspector dropped his fists to his blotter. So that explained it, he thought. That was why McKay was so hot on getting in touch. He wanted to make it seem as if the decision to assign Callahan came

from his office, not higher upstairs.

"So why is the captain trying to lead me by the nose?" Harry wanted to know.

"It's McKay's case," Bressler explained, "but the chief wanted you on it personally."

Callahan frowned. "I thought he didn't like my style."

"Nobody likes your style, Harry," Bressler said flatly. "But you get results, and that's why the boss wanted you. So what have you got so far?"

"Very little sleep," Harry reported. "Lieutenant, I've been up for almost two days."

"Oh yeah," Bressler remembered. "That Bender thing."

"I got results," Callahan said sarcastically.

"It was an open and shut case, Harry," the lieutenant assured him. "The money was embezzled and all the information on the hit was found at Tuccio's office. He was going to frak an associate so a real estate deal would go through. And you didn't kill him. All your actions were clearly self-defense. You just saved the taxpayers a lot of money."

"I'll bet McKay feels the same way," Harry answered with a touch of sardonicism.

Bressler leaned forward conspiratorily. "Between you and me," he said with soft haste, "I don't think McKay will be happy until you lick his shoes when you want a case, drop your pants when you want a warrant, and kiss his ass when you make an arrest."

Harry leaned back, mock shock in his eyes. "Lieutenant, I do believe you're learning."

Bressler threw his hands up, turning away from the desk and pacing the floor. "You wouldn't believe the garbage that's been going down around here this morning," he said as a way of explanation. "The mouths upstairs are getting as tight as their assholes. They're really constipated about something, Harry, so if the shit hits the fan, it's all going to drop on you. Now tell me what the hell you've got."

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" said Bressler in pained amazement. "You've got nothing?"

"No," Harry disagreed. "We've got a corpse less than twenty-four hours old."

"So what?"

"So this," Harry ticked off on the fingers of one hand. "The face is

all but gone, but the skin hasn't deteriorated yet. And where there's flesh, there's fingerprints. And where there's fingerprints, there might be a file."

"Only if she committed a crime," Bressler reminded him.

"It's a start," Harry countered. "Compared to what we had before she showed up, it's a big head start."

"It's slim," Bressler disagreed. "But at least it's something. What are you going to do next?"

Ron Caputo from downstairs in Missing Persons saved Harry from having to tell his immediate superior that he had absolutely no idea. The blond officer quartered on the fourth floor talked directly to Bressler. "Reineke told me you'd be here, Lieutenant. I think you better come listen to this," he said, then turned his head toward the Inspector. "I hear you're on the Mortician Murderer case too, Harry. You'll probably want to hear this as well."

He led them out of Harry's nook and walked toward Bressler's office —the only one on the floor that was completely enclosed. A Chinese detective Harry remembered was named Alex Wu and an extremely well built young woman were in the office. Her shape was all Callahan could make out since her reddish blonde hair was cascading over her face as her head hung down.

Bressler recognized Wu as well. "Rape case?" he asked Caputo, who nodded.

"But more," the Missing Persons man promised. "A lot more."

As he said it, the girl raised her head and looked at the approaching trio. Then Harry could clearly see the bruises and welts that was marring her otherwise extraordinary beauty. From among the blotches and discolorations, her blue eyes burrowed into Callahan's face like burning spotlights.

The information was not long in coming, and as Caputo promised, it was spectacular.

Harry went over it in his mind again while sitting at the bar of The Third Degree, a dive for cops on Tenth Street less than a half mile from headquarters.

He had drifted over at three-thirty in the afternoon, needing a respite from the last twenty-four hours. Things had slowed quite a bit in the long, dark, heavily wooded place since the lunch crowd and it was just beginning to wind up again for Happy Hour. The bar was along one wall, with a row of booths along the other. In between the two were tables set for twos and fours. There was a cigarette machine next to the bar, a television above it, and a jukebox at the end of the

booths. Harmless police paraphernalia was tacked up everywhere.

"Turn that off, will you, Clarence?" Callahan asked, motioning at the T.V.—seeing that there were only a few patrons in the booths and none were watching the soap opera that was playing with the sound off.

"Sure," said the barkeep, slapping the set off with one pudgy paw. "What can I get you, Harry?" he asked. He was the burly Irishman, one of two bartender-partners of which the other was the Italian Tony Donzelli.

"A double scotch," the inspector replied. Clarence usually asked his afternoon patrons if they were on duty, but he didn't bother with Harry. "And a beer chaser," Callahan added.

"On tap," Clarence replied lightly while Harry thought about Kim Byrnes' eyes.

They gave off momentarily flickerings of bright life that made their return to dullness all the more sad. It was heartening to note that her brutal attacker had not beat all the emotion out of her. Nor had the news that her best friend had been murdered.

Yesterday it was an unlucky night to be young, female, and good looking. As near as Bressler, Wu, Caputo, and Callahan could figure, Lisa Patterson was getting murdered while Kim Byrnes was getting raped. Having done a quick once over on her brownstone, Detective Wu couldn't find an immediate source of entry—a broken window or a jimmied door—but he also didn't see any special locks or precautions to keep the seasoned, professional rapist out.

Being best friends, Patterson was the first one Byrnes called after her assailant had left. When she heard that no one was answering the phone, she called a cab and went over to Patterson's apartment. Finding no one there, she was in the perfect mood to assume the worst and called the police.

Unable to get a clear story out of her, the uniforms turned her over to the desk sergeant. Seeing her condition, he turned her over to the rape squad. It was only when Wu pieced together her story that he called in Caputo. And finally, the Missing Persons man was knowledgeable enough to remember the wealth of Jane Does which were shipped over to the morgue from Mount Douglas that morning.

Clarence dropped the two glasses in front of Harry just as the inner door of the bar flew open and four guys in motorcycle outfits came sauntering in.

They spread out like they owned the place, one sitting at the bar down to Harry's left, the other sitting to Harry's right, and the other two leaning against the booths behind him.

“It’s a beautiful day,” one of the booth cyclists said to a seated couple. “You shouldn’t be wasting it.” He then picked up both their drinks and handed one to his standing friend.

Callahan didn’t even glance around, although Clarence was not reluctant to express his feelings. “You guys have got to be crazy if you think you can start trouble here.”

“No trouble, pops,” the one to Harry’s left told him, smiling beneath his mirrored sunglasses. “Just making a healthy suggestion, that’s all.”

Clarence swallowed his anger and took the diplomatic approach. “Sorry about that, folks,” he told the now nervous couple. “I’ll get you another round.”

As Clarence’s hands went under the bar, the sitting cyclist pulled a revolver out of his leather jacket.

Harry had no trouble recognizing it—or any of the others when the three companion hoods got theirs out. It was the infamous Saturday Night Special; the cheaply made, inexpensive, mass-produced revolver, usually either a .22 or .25 caliber, that one could acquire underground. These particular versions looked to be the higher caliber models.

“No, you won’t, pops,” he advised affably. “And you’ll keep away from your gun under there too, won’t you?” Then, without a trace of kindness, he snapped, “Hands on the bar. Now!”

Clarence complied. Harry remained motionless, only moving to take a swig of his beer.

The couple in the booth moved to rise, only the two punks were blocking their exit, two more guns wrapped tightly in their gloved hands.

“You had your chance,” one of the leather-jacketed bikers told them. “Now just sit back and relax, OK?”

The pair took the hint. They both slowly returned to their seats, the girl’s eyes tearing, the boy’s eyes wild.

This time Harry did look around, his head and eyes moving as if he were only minutely interested. He saw that the well-dressed couple was in their late twenties—probably lovers taking a break from their respective jobs. The expressions on both their faces said that this sort of violence was something they did not comprehend.

Harry turned slowly back to look at his own face in the mirror behind the bar.

“If it’s money you want,” Clarence told the lead hood, “you can just forget about it. I’ve already banked this afternoon’s receipts in there.” He motioned his head at a squat, thick safe on the floor which looked

to be about a half a ton heavy and came complete with a miniature time lock. “Even I can’t open it until tonight.”

“We don’t want your money, man,” the lead man with the gun said, smiling. “We just want to talk to your friend there. He’s the one they call Dirty Harry, ain’t he?”

Clarence said nothing—just looked in Callahan’s direction. The tired Inspector slowly turned toward the seated motorcycle gunman, his face highlighted by the glowing beer signs behind the bar.

“Well, if you know about somebody called Dirty Harry,” the cop said softly through clenched teeth, “then you know what he did to four motorcycle punks just like you.”

The gunman smiled even wider. “That was a lot of years ago, Dirty Old Harry,” the guy said, his smooth, young cheeks stretched from ear to ear. “Take your gun out and lay it on the bar.”

“Fuck you,” said Harry, going back to his drinks.

That gave the gunman pause. “I said give me your gun or I’ll scatter this guy’s brains all over the mirror!” He pushed the barrel of his snub-nose revolver toward Clarence.

Harry looked over again. “And if you do that, I’ll blow off all your heads.”

The gunman’s expression wavered, then his smile shakily returned. “Are you that fast?” he said with skeptical derision.

Callahan looked at his own face in the glass. It was devoid of emotion. “Do you feel lucky?”

The question hung in the bar like a mushroom cloud. Then the gunman snorted. “We just want to know,” the leader breathed. “We just want to know if Dirty Harry is a fag hag, OK? We just want to know whether the pig likes his meat dark or white, you know what I mean? We just want to let him know that we know, dig? And that it’s got to stop. It’s going to stop. Soon.” He turned to the two in the booth. “You tell the other pigs that when they come to clean the mess up.” He kept his gun on Clarence and motioned at Harry with his head. “OK,” he said. “Waste him.”

Harry just heard the words emerging from the man’s mouth before he started to move. As the lead gunman was speaking, the cop was raising the beer to his lips. But at the last minute, he continued the motion quickly to throw the liquid over his shoulder and into the eyes of the man to his right.

Even though the hood’s gun was out, the stinging liquid sent him sputtering back, his snubnose revolver wavering. Harry kept his momentum, letting the toss whirl him around, his left hand grabbing a

fistful of the blinded man's shirt. He pulled him forward just as the two men by the booth aimed and fired.

Their point blank bullet sparked across the room and burrowed into the trunk of their friend. Harry hunched behind the punk, his right hand wrapping around the ample .44. He felt the hood jerk in his hands as the tiny balls of lead ripped up his insides, seeing the lead hood out of the corner of his eye.

The boss gunman was shouting in surprise and bringing his own revolver over for a clear shot at Harry's profile.

As soon as the barrel left Clarence he was ducking and sliding under the bar. He fell to his knees, ripped the .357 Python from its holder under the counter and shot through the bar.

The slow, deflected bullet punched the lead man in the pelvis, doubling him over and throwing off his own aim. The .25 round meant for Harry hit his own man's right hip.

By then Harry had his own gun out to return the favor. He threw the wounded kid forward with his left hand while pointing and firing the Magnum to his right with his right.

The hood who served as his shield took down the punk to the left of the booth while Harry's bullet picked up the man to the right of the innocent couple and threw him over the back of the woman's chair. His own gun shot the ceiling as he dove back, somersaulted over the seat top, and landed flat on the next booth's empty table.

The lead hood had stumbled back, clutching his waist, and stopped, leaning up against the door. He brought his Saturday Night Special up again just as Harry pivoted. Both Callahan and Clarence shot the boss boy a second time at once.

The combination of the .44 and the .357 slug propelled him back first through the stained glass window of the entrance, his own gun being ripped from his hand by a jagged shard.

Harry's attention was brought back to the last man to the left of the booth by the hood's bullets. He felt one pass between his side and his left arm. He swung his head and Magnum back to see the kid's gleeful face just over his dead companion's shoulder.

The punk thought he learned something from Harry. After Callahan threw his wounded pal on him, he got back up, using his dying friend as a shield just the way Harry did. His expression said that he could empty his paltry revolver into Harry while the cop couldn't stop him.

Only he didn't know the .44 very well. Harry pulled the trigger, the Magnum missile going right through the wounded man's back and then right through the man behind him.

The shielded kid felt his buddy's insides explode against him just as the slug drilled into his chest as well. They were both dead, smoking holes in their torsos, even as they were falling onto the adjoining booth's seat. Together, locked for an instant in a death kiss, they rolled under the table.

Harry lowered his smoking gun as he unbent his knees, his eyes squinting through the gunpowder haze. The man in the booth rose from beneath his table, his mouth open. The girl was still pushed back into a corner, her eyes tightly shut and her hands over her ears. Clarence pushed his .357 over the bar and then rose behind it.

The job done, Harry holstered his weapon, turned back to the bar, and hefted the scotch to his mouth. *"Salut,"* he said.

"Jesus, Harry," Clarence breathed. "What the hell was that all about?"

"Damned if I know," Harry said. "But I've got a very bad feeling I'm going to find out."

CHAPTER

Six

It was old home week back at headquarters. Waiting for him in the Lieutenant's office this time was not only Bressler, but Captain McKay, Walter White, a rested Fatso Devlin, and Sergeant Lynne McConnell of the vice squad. It was good to see McConnell again, especially since after their last case together he wasn't sure whether she'd ever recover. He had taken her out of a box moments before she was to be loaded into a ship and sent off to parts unknown by a group of child pornographers and white slavers.

Thankfully for all concerned, she was unconscious for most of her ordeal and bounced back from it with very little problem.

Their reunion was limited since Bressler immediately took up where he had left off that morning. "Where the hell did you disappear to now?" he demanded. "I wish to hell you'd let somebody know where you're going."

"He answers only to the Lord," McConnell suggested.

"And sometimes even He has problems getting through," Walter cracked.

"I don't need your jokes now, White," Bressler warned. "Nobody does," he continued, glancing at a placid McKay—who was sitting on the edge of the Lieutenant's desk, his arms folded.

Bressler turned to Harry. "Have you been watching the news?"

Callahan blinked. It seemed as if he couldn't avoid television no matter what he did. "No," he replied. "Why?"

"It was everywhere," Devlin mused. "They even interrupted *Merv* with the news."

"What news?" Callahan asked anybody.

"You tell him," Bressler demanded of White. "You're the one who found out."

"We identified the most recent Jane Doe," White told him.

"I know that," Harry countered, confused but unimpressed. "I was here when they brought Kim Byrnes in."

"He found her matching fingerprints in my files, Harry," McConnell elaborated.

“In Vice?” Harry considered the first possibility that came to mind. “What was she, a hooker?”

“Close,” said Bressler. “Homosexual.”

The words spoken to him in the bar suddenly echoed through the office. “What does television have to do with that?” Harry wanted to know, his voice even but angry.

The lieutenant looked cautiously at the still expressionless McKay before answering. “Somehow the press has gotten hold of it,” Bressler explained. “They are suggesting that all the murders might be gay-related.”

McConnell spelled it out. “They are reporting rumors on the street that Mount Douglas was not just a cemetery for dead women, but dead lesbian women.”

“A graveyard for queers,” Devlin breathed. “Jesus, that’s just what we need.”

Callahan understood all too well what that might mean. Of all the major cities in America, San Francisco was the one most associated with the gay community. Homosexuals had come out of the closet and spilled into the streets, organizing into a sizable and effective political force. Everyone from the mayor’s office on down worked very hard not to polarize the already tense homosexual and heterosexual interrelationships.

Now, if there was any chance of a psycho specifically killing only lesbians, it would set the fuse for an explosion much like the one San Francisco experienced in 1906. Only this earthquake wouldn’t destroy buildings—it would figuratively rip the city in half, turning the two already sensitive factions against each other. And naturally, in the name of news, the local stations had introduced the concept to the masses long before anything could be proven.

“White,” Bressler snapped. “I want the lid shut so tight on your examinations of the McLaren remains that even you have trouble breathing, understand?” The labman nodded. “I don’t want anything said here today to go beyond these four walls, agreed?” the Lieutenant continued. Everyone nodded except McKay. “From here on in, no one in this department knows anything about a graveyard for quee . . . I mean a homosexual cemetery, is that clear?” Bressler breathed easier when all present seemed to concur. “It would only make the investigation that much more difficult,” he concluded.

At that, Captain McKay finally spoke up, his voice an unctuous monkey wrench in the homicide works. “I can not agree,” he said, rising from his haunches, his arms still crossed. “It only makes the investigation that much easier,” he told them all. “If the murderer kills

only lesbians, then our field of search is limited."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "It has to be somebody who lives on the planet Earth."

Bressler was quick to soften Callahan's sarcasm with a disagreement of his own. "Captain, the killer could be anyone."

"Yes," McKay calmly countered. "But perhaps the victim couldn't be. If the murderer kills only lesbians, then we can create made-to-order bait." He looked pointedly at McConnell and all eyes followed.

"Forget it, Captain," she said.

McKay's eyebrows raised. "Watch your language," Bressler snapped. The captain waved the interruption away.

"That's hardly what I'd call police spirit or teamwork, Sergeant," he admonished.

"Begging the captain and lieutenant's pardons, but it's not what you think, sirs," McConnell went on. "It's just that everybody on the street knows me. The girls, the dikes, the pimps, and the fags. If I dressed up and went cruising, they'd all laugh and tell me Halloween is one month off."

This settled the officer's disquiet and made Callahan breathe a silent breath of relief too. He had to admit that after "The Long Death" case, he just wouldn't feel right about putting McConnell in the line of fire again. Especially since he almost lost her last time.

But the sigh of relief caught in his throat when McKay saved face with his next brilliant decree.

"Well, all is not lost," he brightened. "We still have that other girl . . . you know, the rape victim. The lesbian's best friend . . ."

"Kim Byrnes," Bressler informed him.

"Yes," McKay smiled. "Ms. Byrnes. After the terrible thing that happened to her and her best friend, I'm sure she'd want to do what she could to catch the homosexual's killer."

"I think she's been put through enough," Harry said without a trace of emotion. "We shouldn't involve an amateur."

"Now that should be her decision, Inspector," McKay retorted in a pseudo-soothing tone. "We can tell her that she might be helping to capture her attacker as well . . ."

"Captain," Bressler said leeringly, afraid that McKay was asking his men to lie.

"Well, it could be true," McKay snapped. "It's not outside the realm of possibility that she could attract both the rapist and the killer."

"We can handle this ourselves," Harry contended. "If something

happens to her . . .” He stopped when he caught the concerned look in Devlin’s eyes. He knew Callahan well enough to see a change in his emotions.

“If something happens to her, what?” McKay almost seethed, daring Harry to say something wrong.

“The press would have a field day,” the inspector finished, wondering what made him bring up the subject in the first place.

“Well then, you’d better see to it that nothing happens to her, Callahan,” the captain taunted. “Ask her to be the bait, Inspector,” McKay commanded. “That’s an order.”

Without waiting for an answer, McKay swept out of Bressler’s office.

Harry said it under his breath.

“Shit.”

It was that kind of day.

CHAPTER

Seven

It was that kind of night too. In memory of Lisa Patterson, Dirty Harry Callahan and Sergeant Lynne McConnell set up her best friend, Kim Byrnes.

To his surprise, the blonde girl hardly resisted the idea of becoming a decoy for the police. Even after her trying experience, she meekly listened to what Harry had to say—including his assurances that they'd do their damndest to make sure nothing happened to her—and then she quietly agreed.

Callahan didn't like that, thinking it was all too easy. She should have asked more questions, she should have been a little doubtful . . . hell, she should have done something!

But instead, she invited Harry into her apartment, which she returned to without qualms, listened, and then agreed. Harry straightened, moving away from the couch where she sat—the couch she had been raped on—went into the kitchen, where Alex Wu sat sipping coffee.

He sent the rape expert in to make sure that Byrnes wasn't agreeing to become bait because she was psychologically vulnerable or self-destructive. Minutes later Wu returned and nodded Callahan back into the girl's presence.

"There have been thousands of others, right?" Kim said, her hands folded in her levi-covered lap. Confused, but unwilling to question her about the statement, Callahan nodded.

"I mean," she self-consciously laughed, "I haven't been the only person in the world to be raped, right? I mean, life goes on, right?" Harry nodded with assurance this time.

"And the way I figure it," she concluded, looking down at her hands, and then slowly up at Harry, "I'd be better off out there hunting the hunter than waiting for him to come after me." The effect of her bravery was near devastating.

Harry's deeply lined face cracked open in a reassuring smile. "Right," he concurred. When he turned, he didn't see her smile. It wasn't the smile of a brave girl. It was the smile a black widow spider might make after taking a soon to be imbibed husband.

“You like her, don’t you?” McConnell asked him later that night.

“I brought you along to be my guide of the underground,” Harry told her, shifting up in the car seat and turning his head toward her. “Not my conscience.”

The decoy process was complete. Byrnes was set loose on the street in a furry white sweater, designer jeans, and heels to elicit the sympathy of any gay person she might meet. All the time she was followed by several shadows. Shadows which were preparing for a long, tedious surveillance operation.

The vice sergeant spit air with an audible “Phew.”

Callahan lowered the binoculars again, shifted his position and looked carefully at his new partner. She was just as attractive as she had been when she worked undercover at Berkeley during the white slavery investigation. Fresh-faced, with long brown hair, she was sleekly packed, but lacked the innocence Byrnes exuded. McConnell was a strong woman, secure within herself. But the younger girl had something less that made her something more.

His look was all that was necessary. McConnell matched his stare for a second, then looked away with a frown that trembled on the edge of indifference and pouting. “You like her,” McConnell judged.

Harry turned back to the passenger window. He had changed from his tweed coat, grey slacks, dark green shirt, and striped tie into a casual night outfit consisting of a dark crew neck shirt, brown slacks, and an elbow-patched corduroy jacket—cut to effectively camouflage the near gigantic Magnum bulge under his arm. He watched the entrance to the small building near Washington Square carefully. It was located between the California School of Fine Arts and the Ferry Building.

Kim Byrnes had gone in there several minutes before; McConnell had suggested that she attend a mobilization meeting of SAFE—the San Francisco Association for Full Equality. Harry marveled at the name and then thought about the girl. Small, voluptuous, but still seemingly lost and beaten.

“She’ll attract every male mothering instinct and every female protective instinct in the place within seconds,” McConnell had predicted, and Harry didn’t doubt it. Kim had all the equipment to be instantly lusted after.

“What’s not to like?” he told the vice cop with a shrug, returning to his surveillance.

“Careful, Harry,” she warned in a friendly, bantering tone. “You play-act at being the tough guy, but inside you’re just as soft as anybody else.”

Harry lowered the binoculars for a second. “I wish you were around this morning to tell that to Bender.”

McConnell ignored that. “I know all about you. I’ve heard about the way you rescue rape and assault victims. Hell, I’ve seen it. Only our Kim is a particularly vulnerable specimen who’s hardly had time to recuperate from her experience. You’re ready to blow apart anything that comes near her.”

“Something wrong with that?” Harry said woodenly, McConnell’s two-bit psychoanalysis beginning to bother him.

“Hell, no, Harry,” she countered sincerely, “but don’t let your judgment go out the window. No girl who looks like that can be totally helpless. She hasn’t gone this far without learning how to get what she wants . . .”

“Did she want a rape?” Callahan interrupted incredulously.

“Of course not!” McConnell flaired, and then softened with hurt understanding. “Come on, Harry . . .”

The Inspector waved the rest of her argument away. A small familiar figure had appeared in the doorway of the SAFE house. “She’s signaling,” he told the sergeant.

“Let’s go then,” McConnell said, beginning to open her door.

“No,” Harry stopped her.

“Harry . . . ,” she said like a mother reprimanding a too eager child. He had to admit that annoyed him more than it should have. There was no reason for him to be irritated by her misconception.

“You said it yourself,” he told her. “They all know you in there. We can’t afford to have Byrnes pegged as a police plant.”

“And if anybody sees your .44 . . . ?” she countered.

Callahan was taking it off even before she finished the argument.

“Harry, I didn’t mean . . . ,” she began with regret.

“When you’re right, you’re right,” he interrupted again, laying the holster and gun on her lap. “If there’s any trouble, one of us will signal you and you can come running.”

“And if no one signals?” she inquired. “How long should I wait?”

“Make a discreet reconnaissance after fifteen minutes,” he decided, already getting out of the car. “Look in after half an hour.”

“Will do,” the vice cop said. But he had already begun running across the street to answer the blonde girl’s call. “Damn!” McConnell seethed, slapping her hand on the steering wheel. “Lovers should never work together.”

Sexual relations were far from Harry’s mind as he moved quickly

toward the entrance. He was thinking instead about what McConnell had told him about the SAFE set-up. The group was led by M. Peter Steele, a balding, blondish man with a slight Australian accent.

Everything about the guy was artificial except his rugged good looks. His name was fake, having changed it from the less solid sounding Raymond Markovitc. His accent was culled from the movies. But false front or not, Steele was as steadfast as his new name.

The one thing he professed to believing in was equal rights for all people under the law. And as his homosexual faction grew larger and more influential, he became more militant. SAFE, however, found itself being foiled by biased legalities at every turn. Whether it was right or not, it seemed that many from the heterosexual faction felt threatened by SAFE'S existence and would do most anything to undercut it.

And with every setback, Steele became more determined to get a fair shake. But after awhile, the doctrine of peace, goodwill, and fairplay was lost in the fanatical effort to achieve it. Now Steele was collecting and hawking an entirely different ball of wax. One that made him the darling of the cocktail set and muckraking reporters.

Harry heard him shouting even while he was still on the sidewalk in front of the building. The words were muddled but there was no mistaking the fiery conviction behind them. He looked at the sign above the boarded up windows and steel front door. It read The Ying-Yang Bookstore and had the appropriate Oriental circular symbol painted nearby. The place used to hawk volumes on zen and macrobiotic cooking.

Callahan had almost no trouble getting in. Slipping his fingers in the crack between the edge of the metal door and brick building, he was able to pull the obstruction open—a feat that was not lost on the two homosexual guards standing inside the entrance. They both took one look at the tall muscular cop and forgot the disapproval they were about to express.

All three were standing at the rear of the one room store, its length stretching at least sixty feet, almost all of which was packed with buzzing, angry humanity. The last few rows, as everywhere, had a life of its own. Just like in school, church, and theaters, those in the last row usually had an attitude slightly bent from the rest of the establishment. Even in the SAFE house it was no different.

"What can I do for you, handsome?" said the man to Harry's left, getting an elbow in his ribs from his male date as a reward.

"Looking for a friend," Harry answered almost truthfully, scanning the crowd for any sign of Kim Byrnes.

“There, you see?” said the first man’s friend. “Mind your own business, Kenny.”

“Later, pal,” the first man said quietly to Harry.

“Sure,” he replied. Not wanting a confrontation of any kind, Harry moved deeper into the throng, hearing more clearly Steele’s shouted words.

The well-built man with the thinning blond hair and the oval head was standing on a small, wooden platform at the very back of the store, flanked by tiny round coffee tables and thin metal chairs. On one of these tables was a java dispenser, on another was a tray of donuts. Around the remainder were people, mostly couples.

Seated at the farthest table to the right was a boney thin-lipped girl with close cut, unkempt red hair. She wore a white T-shirt and tight black pants. She had her arm around the white fuzzy-sweatered shoulders of Kim Byrnes. The smaller, better built girl was holding both hands of the girl on her left, her eyes intently watching Steele as he whipped his lecture to the boiling point.

“The truth is finally coming out!” the man was booming, his voice sonorous. “Finally, you can see what I’ve been saying all along is true! There is a plot abroad in the land . . . There is . . . a conspiracy!”

At this point, most of those in front echoed the speaker’s sentiment, their fists upraised. “Conspiracy!” they cried.

Harry looked closer, pushing his way through the group on the right. Coming around near the coffee machine, he saw Steele’s cheering section, his own personal peanut gallery. The dozen or more men and women who sat there were all of a ruddy type, dressed in a makeshift uniform.

Black berets were worn by the men at a jaunty angle, while the ladies had little leather caps with narrow brims, They all had leathery jackets that came down to their thighs, on which they wore dark pants tucked into black boots. Harry caught glimpses of shiny things on their belts below turtleneck sweaters—some he recognized as chain links, while others were more esoterically unfathomable.

“Yes!” Steele continued. “A conspiracy. A conspiracy to rid you of your rights, your homes, your friends, and finally . . . !”

As he rattled off the list, his front row backers started chanting with him, their fisted arms punching at the air. As they struck upward, their sleeves receded, revealing what looked like something combining the sadistic with the medieval. Alternating strips of leather were attached to strips of copper steel. They were long, reaching from the wrist to almost their elbows from what Harry could tell.

“Yes!” Steele repeated what seemed to be a favorite word, then his manner and voice grew prophetically quiet. “Finally your lives.”

The whole place added to the uproar this time. Callahan stayed off to the side where things were a bit more quiet. He watched the choppy-haired redhead with her arm around Byrnes whisper something in the girl’s ear. He saw Kim turn at the suggestion and shake her head.

“It’s happening already,” Steele warned. “You’ve read about it! You’ve heard about it! They’re digging our sisters out of the ground. The bodies have been piling up there for years! How many were buried there? How many more graveyards filled with our murdered brothers and sisters are there? You’ve seen it yourself, you know what I’m talking about.

“Each one of you,” he said intently, pointing at the gathered mass. “Each one of you has had a friend. A friend you met one day, but when you went to find them the next, they were gone. Disappeared. Admit it! You’ve all had something like that happen to you. I have. Where did they go? Well, I can tell you. They went underground! Six feet underground. Down, down into the San Francisco dirt!”

Steele tried to continue, but the crowd was getting unruly. Things were finally brought back to a semblance of order by the peanut gallery who started to chant, “Tell us more.”

Soon everyone joined the chant, so they were ready to quiet down when Steele raised his hands. “How could this happen?” he asked them, “I’ll tell you how. Because for years there’s been a conspiracy. An extermination plot fostered by the fathers of this city to get rid of one thorn in their side—the homosexual community. Like the blacks in the Civil War . . . like the Jews in the Second World War . . . we are the oppressed minority that the killers in the government think they can wipe out! Well, I say no!”

With great passion everyone inside the room agreed with him. Even Kim’s comrade let go of her long enough to lean forward and raucously agree with the man. He basked in their energy for a few moments, his arms out, then he started shouting over their cheers.

“When you kill a brother, it’s called fratri-cide! When you kill an entire racial group, it’s called geno-cide! In San Francisco, it’s called homo-cide!”

The room shook with madness. Harry thought, this guy was a bad combination of a television reporter and evangelist. He took unsubstantiated reports and whipped his followers into a false froth, leading them to drink the stuff before they knew what was in it. He could understand now why Kim had signaled him in. M. Peter Steele

was only making matters more difficult for the police.

Harry decided to have a discreet little talk with the man. By the looks of it, he had the power to do the gay community either serious harm or good. If he could mobilize his task force effectively, they might work together with the police to run the killer to ground. Otherwise they'd be nothing better than a lynch mob.

Having finished his speech, Steele left his low podium to move among his people on the floor. He stepped off to his left first, walking right up to Kim and her partner, taking one of each of their hands in both of his. After a quick firm handshake, he moved on, clasping hands with many others.

There was a sea of people between Harry and the SAFE leader so the cop moved forward as the crowd surged around Steele. Judging by his rate of progress, Harry could catch up to the man halfway toward the door. Both men kept pushing their way through the mass, each intent on a different purpose. Steele was smiling, waving, and handshaking like a winning politician, while Harry was only intent on catching up.

He didn't worry about Byrnes. She had gotten decent instructions from Wu on how to act. She'd be friendly and open, but reluctant to go further than that. Her story was she had just broken up with a lover and wasn't ready to get into anything serious. If the partner became too insistent, Byrnes could tell them about the death of her best friend. That would cool anybody's ardor.

Callahan turned his head to take a last look at Byrnes before he approached Steele. Over the bobbing heads of the others pressing to reach their leader, he could see their table was now empty. Harry's head whirled around, but he couldn't spot Kim or her companion anywhere. It was possible that he had lost them among the masses in the smokey interior.

Suddenly worried, Harry pressed harder to reach his quarry. He was able to break through the general audience, but then he came up against a circle of Steele's cheerleaders, who acted, in this case, like Secret Service men. They weren't professional guards, however, so Harry was able to move around toward the front to circumvent them. He was just a few heads away from Steele, his hand already outstretched, when he heard a gasp coming from the left.

He looked in that direction just as Steele was about to clasp his hand. "Oh my God! It's him!" he heard a strident voice say. "It's Harry Callahan!" He saw the words emitting from the mouth of an overweight bearded young man with glasses. As the words reached his ears, he thought he vaguely recognized the boy.

That made no difference to Steele, who automatically gripped Harry's fingers, not comprehending the meaning of the bearded man's words. But when the kid saw that, he jumped forward, shouting "No!" He pushed their two hands apart and stood protectively in front of his leader, pointing at the undercover cop as if he had the plague.

"Don't you understand?" he all but shrieked. "That's Callahan! Inspector Harry Callahan. He's the one who shot our four brothers."

The cop recognized him now. The bearded man was one of the many people who crowded the Justice Department steps, camera or tape recorder in hand. He was a reporter. His shout and push was enough to stop Steele's parade right in its tracks. Callahan saw that when the SAFE leader heard the word "police," he went deathly white.

The scene remained frozen that way for what seemed like minutes. But then the reporter put a more potent cap on his interruption by saying, "Watch out! He might have a gun!"

Steele was suddenly pulled back, his protectors surging toward the surprised policeman.

Harry moved quickly. He certainly wasn't interested in taking on the entire San Francisco chapter of SAFE. He turned and charged toward the door.

His way was blocked by four beret-topped SAFE men. Just as quickly as he tried to run, Harry spun back and opened his coat to show them that he carried no weapon. No sooner had he revealed that than somebody punched him in the stomach.

The woman in the middle of the SAFE guards had stepped forward and let Harry have it as hard as she could. He doubled over, his arms wrapped around his waist. The girl moved in to kick him in the balls.

The boot came up unerringly between Harry's legs. He watched it coming, his head down in a "oh man, I'm hurt" stance. But at the last second, he let his hands drop from his stomach and cup around the girl's ankle. She was forced to move forward to keep her balance, pulling her almost right on top of Callahan.

Then he straightened up like a wrecking ball. The top of his head cracked into her jaw; the sound sharp enough to send a jolt through all present. After her initial strike, they thought they were going to have easy pickings.

Harry took advantage of their surprise by following the falling girl. He practically pushed the woman into the other guards behind her, clearing a space for him to break through deeper in the store. They moved away from the cop as if he were a leper and charged the front door as if the place was on fire.

Callahan didn't mind. Their panic kept the four guards at the door pinned, making it a lot easier for him to move. The non-militant SAFE members backed away to the walls and then ran forward, leaving the back of the room to the caps, berets, and Harry. As he ran past them toward the back wall, his eyes searched for a possible escape route.

There had to be one, because as quickly as he scanned, he noted that Steele was no longer in sight either. He had probably gone the way Kim and her friend exited because they too did not leave by the front entrance. Harry hurled tables behind him, scattering the chairs as they fell. The store became an obstacle course. As he ran out of room, two of his pursuers, one man and one woman, got their legs caught in the rolling furniture. They both went down.

There were two doors on the rear wall—one to the right in the corner and one to the left near a white-washed window.

Harry chose the left door. He reasoned that behind the window—opaque or not—there was most likely a way out of the building. Grabbing the almost empty metal tray of donuts as he pivoted sharply to the left, he swung it viciously behind him, catching a male pursuer in the neck. He choked, reddened, and went down, the tray flipping over his falling head.

Having cleared the way, Harry raced to the left-hand door, seeing that it opened outward. Not worrying about a lock or taking the time to turn the knob, he bellowed and sent himself through the air. He smashed lengthwise into the door with all his power, ripping the rotting thing out of the doorjamb and practically pulling its pins out of the wall.

The door swung back, Callahan flew through, and smashed in a standing position against the back wall of a tiny bathroom.

"Kim," Steele breathed into her ear as the two were running. "Kim, please. Slow down."

But the girl was too excited, too thrilled at the way things were turning out. She flew in front of both Steele and her female companion, leading them down one alley after another.

It was an incredible stroke of luck that the reporter had been there to identify Callahan. It saved her the trouble of siccing the SAFE guards on him in the alley just outside the right back door—the same door through which she had hustled Steele.

Now, hopefully, the brawny guards would beat him to death. But whether he was killed or just severely mauled didn't matter to her. She was safe either way. But to make the plan complete, there was one other loose end to cover.

She kept running, concentrating on her plan, until Steele, nervous and tired, began to stumble.

"Kim," the redhead called, taking the SAFE leader's arm. "We're losing him."

Only then did the girl slow, reaching into her pocket.

"Come on, Michael," she admonished, taking some white powder in a little baggie out of her pocket. "You can do it. Just need a little more fuel, that's all." She stuck the open top of the plastic holder under his nose, and he inhaled. Seconds later, they were running again.

"Jesus, Kim," the redhead complained, still at Steele's side. "Now I need to rest. I've got to stop."

"You'll rest soon enough," Byrnes promised. She led them right around a corner where the maze of alleys finally emptied into a dark back street. Blocking their way was a lone police car.

"Oh my God," Steele moaned.

"Take it easy, Michael," Kim soothed. "Here," she said, handing him the bag of drugs. "Take this and run."

"But I can't take this!" he wailed. "What if they catch me?"

"They won't catch you," Byrnes vowed. "Just get some of your boys together and go to the hideout. We'll meet you there later."

"But Kim . . . ," the SAFE leader whined, glancing with trepidation at the patrol car.

"Don't worry," she demanded. "We'll delay the cops. You just get going. Hurry!"

Steele raced off in a panic, his strength and fiery leadership in the bag of powder he clasped in his sweaty hand.

"I swear," the redhead said, looking at him go. "He's nothing without you, is he?"

"Never mind that now," the other female said. "Let's just keep this pig from following him."

"You lead the way," the redhead said. "He'll be more interested in you anyway."

"No, no," Kim disagreed. "You do the talking. I'll just stay in the back, looking available.

The redhead giggled. "Good idea. I'll give him the old 'who, us?' routine."

Kim nodded and they both started moving forward.

As they approached, the redhead could see the silhouette of a man behind the driver's seat in the light from the street beyond. As they

got closer, he slowly opened the door and stepped out. He came to the front of the car as they got close enough to see him. He was fairly young looking—with brown hair and a mustache.

“Hello, officer,” the redhead said, coming close.

“What are you two doing out here so late at night?” the cop asked, his voice flat.

“Who us?” the redhead asked. Kim came up behind her companion and hit her as hard as she could on the top of the head with a piece of asphalt.

There was a sharp, wet thunk that filled the alley followed by the soft thud of the redhead collapsing to the ground. Byrnes fell on her knees beside the body and continued slamming the rock into the girl’s skull.

“Damn dike,” she hissed as the jagged piece of black stone rose and fell in her hands, its surface oozing a liquid red. “Motherfucking lesbo. I’ll show you. I’ll teach you a thing or two.”

“Come on,” shouted the man. “We don’t have time for this. Where are the others?”

But Byrnes continued oblivious. The force of her blows was so strong that the asphalt chunk was beginning to turn to powder in her hands. She reared up, with a maddened look in her eyes, and searched the alley until she found a section of board. She smashed that into the girl until, in her fury, she broke it against the ground.

“That’s enough,” the cop said, grabbing her arms. “We can’t take the chance of being seen.”

“What’s the matter?” Byrnes spat back, breathing heavily. “Pissed you can’t rape her like all the others?”

“She’s part of the plan, remember?” he answered sarcastically. “We’ve got to get her into place before the rest of the force shows up.”

“Don’t worry,” Byrnes said, moving back from the corpse. “I know just where we can put her where it’s guaranteed she’ll be found by morning.”

CHAPTER

Eight

So much for logic. Harry had been expecting to hit the far wall of an alley, but the toilet wall brought him up short. He saw another window, too small for him to break through, perpendicular to the larger window on the outside wall. It was just his luck that the building was L-shaped and not just square.

Now he was standing, stunned, in a bathroom, while the raging remnants of the SAFE guards picked their way around fallen comrades, tables, chairs in an assault on the john. The first one there was one of the unluckiest. He was a swift Adonis type, who had a wide, teeth-gritted grin on his face, his hands held like claws at his side. His smile disappeared when Harry slammed the door in his face.

The old door, unable to handle any more stress, broke into hunks of splinters. Dust and wood splinters spread through the small antechamber like a cloud.

The door was only a temporary obstruction. After it broke, the dazed guard kept going, smashing into the rear wall. The cop didn't wait for the blond's eyes to clear. He gave him a straight arm shot in the jaw, sending the man's head through the little window. His skull squeezed through and held him upright as Callahan concerned himself with other problems.

The second fleetest of foot was a woman. She was flat on the heels of her predecessor. He kicked her right under the kneecap. Her smug grin faltered slightly when she felt the sharp pain on her leg, but it returned when the wound didn't stop her. She took another step in triumph, but the smirk vanished completely when the leg he had kicked collapsed under her weight.

She fell to her knees right in front of him. As he looked down at her, he noticed a mop standing in a bucket of rancid water squeezed between the toilet and the wall. He lifted both just as the remaining guards came at him with the coffee maker. Two men held the container by its handles and base. Then they hurled the hot stuff at Harry just as he threw the contents of the mop bucket at them.

Harry ducked as the liquids met in midair. The hot coffee meeting the cold water created an explosion of water and steam.

The combination of the two temperatures was enough to lessen the scalding as Harry used the diversion to duck and roll under the water, coming up against the back wall, darting toward the right door.

To his annoyance, there were more SAFE guards there, well out of the line of the liquid fire. There were a half dozen waiting, most of them rather burly. They were waiting for Harry to come to them, but he would have none of it. He immediately turned tail and ran back the way he had come.

Coming out of the john was the woman he had just kicked, looking upset. She held the end of the mop as if she meant business. Harry went right for her as she swung the long stick.

Ducking under the pole, he lifted her right off the ground so that she went through the left window back first, protecting him from most of the glass shards. They both tumbled into a dirty alley.

As he rolled to his feet, Harry grabbed the mop from the dazed girl's hands. But just as he stood, one of the boys tried to leap out the shattered window after him. Harry pushed the mop head into the middle of his attacker's chest and held on as if the sweeper was a battering ram.

The mop was strong enough to stop the jumper in midflight. With a sudden, abrupt push, Harry sent him back the way he came, just in time to collide with a second jumper who thought there'd be no obstruction. He heard them collapse on the store floor.

Harry ran left to the end of the alley and turned right. The adjoining alleyway went for some thirty yards before emptying onto the street, but its mouth was filled with more SAFE guards. They must have left the store by the front door to circle around the block in time to cut him off.

Harry glanced behind him. Mop aside, people were pouring through the broken window and coming after him. He was blocked. There was no place else to go but up.

The lowest section of the wall around him was less than eight feet high. Summoning all his strength, Harry jumped, his forearms wrapping around its top while his legs scraped for a toehold.

Callahan pulled viciously, almost forcing his body up by sheer will-power alone. He felt one hand grabbing his heel just as he was able to swing his torso up and roll across the top of the wall. His shoe came off.

He slithered off the wall and found himself lying on his back on the roof of a car. He was spread-eagled, his knees and elbows bent. He looked around to see that he was on one end of a small sea of cars. He had rolled into an elevated parking lot: the kind where piggyback

machines held three cars in a bunk bed arrangement over the same spot.

It must have been an overnight parking lot since Harry could see no manager, and any car behind the first row at the street's entrance would be impossible to get out on a moment's notice.

Another athletic SAFE guard vaulted over the wall, fully expecting to land on the ground and give chase. He was very surprised when he landed on the slick, uneven purchase of a car seemingly hovering off the ground. He slipped across the highly polished roof of a Mercedes, his chin slamming against the metal, and dropped clumsily inbetween two rows of automobiles. Harry heard some sickening sounds of contact before the man hit the dirt.

As the guard was falling, Harry sat up to pull off his other shoe. He was just in time to throw it at another guard who stuck his head over the wall. The solid leather shoe hit the man in the face and bounced off. The man, whose head disappeared, left only the start of a nose bleed on the stone.

Then Callahan got up and leaped to the next car. He kept going until he reached the center of the darkened lot. He stopped on the car roof there, and turned to face his enemy.

The SAFE guards were spread out on almost all the roofs behind him, waiting like a chess set. The man standing in the lead was a curly-haired muscular man—one who had taken off his jacket and sweater to reveal a tank top and incredible rolling muscles.

"Don't bother trying to run anymore," he told Harry lightly. "The others are circling the block and will cut you off any second."

Harry responded by jumping from the center car to one car behind it, away from the street.

"Don't bother trying to get out the back way either," he said. "As you can see, the buildings are blocking you, and we'll reach you before you get five feet."

Harry casually stepped from the roof of the Camaro he was on to its trunk, then across to a Volkswagon Rabbit's hood and onto its roof. "What do you want?" he asked, his voice rough.

"The question is, what do you want, Inspector Callahan? Did you seriously think you could assassinate Steele and just walk away?"

"Of course not," Harry said, moving warily toward the back of the yellow car. "I'm not out to assassinate anybody. I just want to capture the one who killed all those women."

"That's what you say," another dark-haired one said smoothly. "But that's not your reputation. You're known as a gun man."

“So where’s my gun?” Harry inquired, hopping from the Rabbit to the hood of a station wagon. By that time he had counted all the SAFE guards. There were eighteen of them—all male—standing on the car roofs. But as he finished that count, more started showing up on the sidewalk.

“That’s what we want to know,” the lead man answered.

“Just listen,” said Harry, letting desperation creep into his voice. “You’re not making any sense. I’d have no reason for killing Steele and even if I wanted to, I’d be crazy to do it in the middle of your headquarters.”

The words seemed to have no effect on the leader, who started to flex his muscles. “We just want you to let it be known,” he said soothingly, “that we will no longer stand for any more spying, any more lying, or any more killing. Before we were content to listen and wait, but now, be warned. We are after blood. And we will not rest until whoever is responsible for our brothers’ and sisters’ deaths are punished. And the suspect and the punishment will have to satisfy us.”

“OK,” Harry said agreeably. “OK, I’ll tell them.”

“Now,” the leader declared. “We will mete out our first punishment for transgressions against our community. You will be an example of the skill and strength of SAFE. You will be the first wrongdoer brought to justice by the Anti-Conspiracy Squad.”

The A-Cs, Harry mentally abbreviated. Cute. He stood his ground as the others started to pull the chains from their waistbands. The link belts served more purposes than keeping their pants up. Swinging them lightly in their hands, they began moving in. These guys were experienced street fighters, Harry realized. He recognized the covers on their wrists. With little studs attached to the leather strip, they could be used for blocking as well as offense.

The night air was cool across Harry’s face as he stood openly on the station wagon’s rear. The oncoming A-Cs might have thought that he didn’t try to run because he knew it was hopeless. But in truth, he just wasn’t ready yet. He remained standing.

The lead man was on the car in front of him, when, at the last minute, Harry turned and jumped toward the lot’s last row. The area became a thumping ground of cars bouncing on their shocks as all the men tried to go from car to car to keep up with Harry. Finally Harry turned with his back up against the wall, his feet on the trunk of a Firebird.

Standing on the Toyota right in front of him, the lead man smiled. Harry dropped off the back of the car and with all his weight landed on the lever which held up the carport.

He honestly didn't want to do it. He was hoping that he could stall long enough so that McConnell could call in the fleet, who'd wrap the bunch up with no problem at all.

But rather than try to outfight eighteen chain-wielding maniacs on top of the cars or outrun Lord knows how many on the ground, Harry had to settle for some destruction of personal property.

It was a game of dominoes. Except little black rectangles were replaced by big metal cars.

The Firebird collapsed on top of the car below it which collapsed on the bottom car, and all rolled forward. Their weight was enough to tip the unit in front of that, which spilled those three autos into the metal bunk in front of it. The dark-haired leader was thrown from his perch when the Firebird rammed the Toyota, sending both it and the tracks it rested upon forward. The muscle man spun down among the shifting metal while doing cartwheels in mid-air.

Not all of the units fell forward. One or two tipped slightly to the right or left, shaking up the auto berths on all sides. Since Harry was standing in the back, the parking lot looked like a sea of cars, its metal surface rippling as if a boulder had been dropped at its edge.

While all the A-Cs were hurled around as if the entire area were struck by an earthquake, Harry stayed exactly where he was, not wanting to risk running into the undulating mass of steel. The SAFE guards on the curb watched in amazement.

But staying on the street wasn't safe either. When the domino theory reached the front bunks, the cars no longer had other vehicles to bump into, so the tipping units poured its trio of autos onto the street. The remaining A-Cs scattered as the cars crashed down onto the concrete, bouncing into each other. They fell off of their perches like so many two-ton matchbox toys.

Only after all the destruction had been done did the police finally show up. They came screeching around the corner in their patrol cars, only to brake hard when they saw the road littered with crumpled autos. The SAFE guards scurried like ants through makeshift metal tunnels while the cop cars screeched to stomach-turning stops or slid into the littered vehicles.

Harry watched the chaos from the back of the lot. Then he strode forward, stepping over groaning A-Cs and tumbled cars.

As he emerged from the lot, some uniforms were rounding up the last of the stunned SAFE guards. Others surveyed the wreckage in amazement. The officer nearest Callahan was scratching his head until he caught sight of the inspector. He smiled smugly and approached, one hand motioning Harry forward and the other on the butt of his

gun.

"Come on, buddy," he said, "let headquarters figure it out. Let's not have any trouble, OK?" he continued. "Let's just go quietly." Callahan opened his mouth to speak, but the officer cut him off. "You can explain later."

Harry let the officer lead him to his patrol car just as a paddy wagon arrived. As the cop was reading Harry his rights, Lynne McConnell hopped out of the wagon's cab. Seeing Harry, she carried over his gun, still in its holster.

"This is yours, I believe, Inspector?" she said pointedly, giving the Magnum to him. The uniformed patrolman's eyes widened and his jaw dropped open in the middle of ". . . if you don't have an attorney, the court can appoint you one."

"About time," Harry grumbled, referring to both the gun and McConnell's appearance.

"Now, wait a minute," the cop said, recovering.

"This is mine too," said Harry, slipping his shield out of his back pocket and flashing the star. As soon as the arresting cop was satisfied, the A-C leader came storming out of the parking lot; his left arm and right hand bloody, his face as contorted as a mad bull's set to charge.

He spotted Harry as he slipped the Magnum into his holster. "You were wondering where my gun was," Callahan told him, pointing the heavy barrel right at the bull's face. "Here it is."

The man stared down the barrel for several seconds, his lower lip loose until two cops appeared to chaperone him to the paddy wagon. "You know," McConnell marveled, "I never believed those stories Devlin and DiGeorgio used to tell about you," she told him. "I do now."

Harry strapped on the specially-made shoulder holster and slipped the Model 29 back home under his arm before shrugging into his jacket. Oblivious to the sergeant's compliment, he muttered, "Now all I need are my shoes." McConnell looked down to see Harry's stockinged feet. "If you find any shoes in there," Harry called to the investigating officers, "they're mine."

Harry turned back to McConnell, all business again. "Where's Byrnes?"

"I thought she was with you," the sergeant said.

Harry pursed his lips, cursing inside. "Did you see Steele?"

"I saw a lot of SAFE members," McConnell elaborated, "they came pouring out of the bookshop like locusts. But not him."

"Are you sure?"

“I’ve run across him enough times. I’m sure.” McConnell was concerned when she saw the look on Harry’s face. “Don’t worry, Inspector,” she tried to soothe him. “There’s a lot of people who were inside that place we haven’t found yet. Byrnes probably just made her way home.”

It was possible. Just because Kim and Steele were among those who avoided the police, it didn’t necessarily mean they were together. It was possible that Byrnes and her companion went off for a drink before the fight even got started. It was possible that they slipped out while Harry was trying to get to Steele. It was possible that he was looking for them behind him when they had already moved up front. It was possible.

Harry decided to look on the bright side of things. They had made some progress in the case and he had avoided serious bloodshed.

“Inspector,” the cop who “arrested” him called. “I think you’d better come look at this.” He was standing in the street next to a Ford Mustang that was resting under a BMW.

Harry moved over with McConnell in tow. When he neared, the cop nodded his head at the front seat. Callahan could see clearly past the undercarriage of the BMW. Even in the dark, there was no mistaking the hacked, blood-splattered corpse of the red-headed lesbian.

CHAPTER

Nine

The arm that had been around Kim Byrnes was lying outside the covering sheet on the morgue slab downtown. As Walter White went by, he nimbly, almost unconsciously, slipped it back under the sheet.

"Angela Mayer," he called her. "Female, caucasian, five feet five and a half inches, one hundred and four pounds. Hazel eyes, pale complexion, dyed red hair. Actual color brown." He paused, flipping back the first page of his findings.

"Struck by a blunt instrument on the top of the head," he reported, continuing on his route. "Death resulting from shock and repeated blows to head and neck." He was walking around and around the slab in one of the clean white labs in the Justice Building's cellar. He was wearing a hole in the tile.

"Could it have been a chain?" Harry asked. The inspector was leaning up against the second of three slabs in the room, placed neatly between the lab counter and the wall refrigerator units.

White stopped for a second, looking up from his shiny metal clipboard. "Could have been a chain," he offered, "among other things. This girl was hit with everything but the kitchen sink. I was picking out pieces of metal, stone, dirt, and wood from her brain until early this morning."

Callahan rubbed his face with both open hands. "I know," he said. "I was upstairs, waiting for your report."

"Gee, Harry, I didn't know," the coroner apologized. "What's so important about this one that you took me off the McLaren I.D. job, anyway?"

Harry didn't want to say that her death might give them a clue to Kim Byrnes' whereabouts. He didn't want to think that her death was just the latest in a long string of lesbian-related murders.

"Nothing," he finally said. "I'm just trying to figure out if there are any new reasons a guy would dance on a woman's face that way, a homosexual or not. They all got a brutal beating, didn't they?"

"Every one," White concurred. "Fractured skulls, battered faces, broken bones; they died painfully, Harry."

The news didn't improve Callahan's disposition. "Anything new in

terms of identification?"

"Nothing that changes anything. From what we've been able to trace through teeth and body markings, some of the Jane Does were assigned real names through Vice's files. Every one a known lesbian, every one arrested at least once during regular shakedowns."

Then Kim's only chance was proving that she wasn't a lesbian . . . if she wasn't dead already. Suddenly it occurred to him that no one had asked the girl what were her sexual preferences. Although police questioners could get pretty base at times, it might not seem important for a rape squad officer to ask. He'd only be interested in getting descriptions—which Kim couldn't supply. And Vice was really only interested in the young girl for her connection with Lisa Patterson.

Harry shook his head. Her sexual interests probably hardly mattered.

What mattered was finding out who was killing these women. The more Harry went over in his mind the occurences of the last twenty-four hours, the less he seemed to be able to hold onto.

The inspector's tortuous thought process was interrupted by Fatso Devlin, who came bursting through the swinging door, looking quickly over his shoulder. "Better get up on the table and pull the sheet over your head, Harry," he said, breathing heavily. "You're as good as dead already."

White asked, "What're you talking about?"

"Have you seen the morning paper?" the detective addressed the lab man directly.

"I haven't even been to sleep yet," he replied, with a pointed look at Callahan.

Rather than retorting, Fatso reached across White and handed Harry the folded paper. Callahan opened it up with White looking over his shoulder. The headline said in bold, eight point type: GAYS CLAIM POLICE CONSPIRACY, under that, just as bold: TOP COPS NAMED. The subheading put the capper on Harry's morning. "CALLAHAN CALLED 'CRIMINAL.' "

"What the hell . . . ?" White exclaimed.

"SAFE is saying we killed that lesbian last night," Devlin exclaimed. "They come right out and say you murdered the four guys in the bar in cold blood, Harry. That if something isn't done about it by us, something will be done about it by them."

"You mean, they're going to try to kill Harry?" White said in confusion.

“I’m not worried about a bunch of homosexuals,” Devlin said. “I’m worried about what McKay will do to him when he finds out.”

“I see you’ve already gotten the morning paper,” said a calm voice at the lab door. White and Devlin whirled around to see McKay himself, perfectly attired in a dark pin-striped suit, standing in the doorway. Callahan glanced up from the paper.

“I was just reading it, sir,” he said diffidently.

“Well, you can read it in my office, Inspector,” the captain said coldly. “You and I have a lot to talk about.”

“They published a letter,” McKay went on, his voice even less civil in the privacy of his office. “An entire letter from that madman . . . that lunatic . . . !”

“Michael Peter Steele,” Harry said, finishing the myriad of connected articles. Articles about the dead girl, articles about her family, articles about gay liberation, articles about famous lesbians in history, articles about SAFE, articles about gay organizations, and even an article analyzing Steele’s handwriting on the infamous letter.

The letter itself was clear, but no less inflammatory than the headlines. It accused the San Francisco City Government and the Police Department with either conceiving or agreeing to a long term conspiracy in which the interests of the homosexual community were systematically undermined.

It concluded by threatening a retaliation in kind and proclaiming that Inspector Harry Callahan was first on their private list of “Most Wanted Criminals” for crimes to and against the homosexual community.

“Great, just great, Callahan,” McKay sneered, his fists on his blotter as he stood behind his desk between the United States and California flags. The emblem of San Francisco was in a frame above his window, which looked out on the Greyhound Bus Terminal.

“I’m glad you have such a good memory,” the captain went on, spitting fire. “Because maybe then you’ll remember your responsibility to this department the next time we unleash you to do a simple job.”

“Simple?” Harry echoed incredulously, looking up from the left seat in front of McKay’s massive, perfectly organized oakwood desk.

“Yes, simple!” the captain contended. “All you were supposed to do was stake-out the meeting and protect a decoy, that’s all. Well, not only do you stick the city with a bill to repair more than three dozen privately owned automobiles, but you let the entire gay community know we’re watching them . . . !”

“Of course we were watching them,” Harry argued impatiently. “What did they expect us to do? Sit home and watch television?”

“I might as well have been watching TV,” came McKay’s boiling retorted. “I see more of you there than I do on the streets. You’re so famous, I’m surprised you don’t give out autographed pictures. Every morning news program had a segment on you today. Every one. And every one dragged out highlights from your ‘illustrious’ career.”

McKay’s manner had changed from rage to bitter sarcasm. “I’ll tell you, Inspector, I couldn’t believe my eyes. Shoot-outs on school buses, motorcycle crashes in the Bay, car chases in Chinatown, even gunfights at the Alamo. Christ, Callahan, I don’t know whether to kick you out on your backside or have you bronzed.”

“Why don’t you let me do my job?” Harry softly replied.

“Your job?” McKay asked with mock incredulity. He leaned over his desk and crooked his finger at the Inspector. “You tell me, Callahan. What’s your job?”

Harry replied, “To nail this murderer.”

“Very good, Inspector, very good,” McKay said quietly while nodding. “Now why don’t you tell me how you’re going to do it now that your face is plastered on every television screen in this city, that every homosexual wants to see you dead, and that you somehow lost the only person who could’ve helped us crack this case?”

“Let them come after me,” Harry said quietly, already knowing it would do little good. “Just wait for SAFE to make its move.”

“What do you think this is?” the captain snorted, pulling his high, plush black chair out. “The Lost and Found Department? Forget it, Callahan. You’re bounced.” He sat down and started reading some reports.

“Captain,” Harry said evenly. “Somebody killed that girl last night. It wasn’t me.”

McKay raised his head, his eyes veiled. “What are you suggesting, Inspector?”

“Angela Mayer was at a SAFE meeting last night. Somewhere between the time she left and the time the police arrived, she was killed. The only people we know who were at the scene were SAFE members and uniformed officers. And if the officers didn’t do it, then who’s left?”

“That doesn’t make any sense, Inspector.”

“What does in this case, Captain? Let SAFE come after me.”

McKay pushed his lower lip over his upper one. “Nice try,” he abruptly decided, going back to his reports. “But if SAFE wants you,

they'll have to get you on your own time. You're officially off this case, Callahan. Report back to Lieutenant Bressler for reassignment. Good morning."

Harry stood stiffly and walked toward the door. "Inspector?" McKay called when he was halfway out. Harry stuck his head back in. The captain gave him his widest smile. "Have a nice day."

There was that move the other detectives perfected every once in a while when things looked bad for Callahan: that glance-up, avoid-his-gaze, go-back-to-work look that's the boon of uncomfortable people everywhere.

The lieutenant was not much different. While Harry sat on his office's tattered couch, Bressler sat down, shuffled papers, got up again, straightened the law books in his pressed woodchip case, poured himself a cup of coffee, shuffled, set the cup down unsipped, lit a cigarette, ran his fingers through his hair, sat down, and rubbed his head again.

"Look, Harry" he said "just lay low for a little while, all right? Take some time off. Get out of town."

"I've been to San Antonio, I've been to Boston, I've been to Chicago. I've even been down to the Caribbean. Where do you want me to go now?"

"I hear Australia's nice . . . ," Bressler ruminated facetiously. "Christ, Harry, I don't have to snow you. You know what kind of pressure the captain and the chief are putting on me."

"McKay wants me out of town?"

"Hell, no!" Bressler exclaimed, surprising himself with his own vehemence. He continued at a near whisper. "He wants you right where M. Peter Steele can get you. Nothing would please him more than pegging the homo for all those deaths, after your murder, of course.

"*I* want you out of town," the lieutenant admitted. "I don't want you to be anybody's scapegoat, let alone McKay's dead one."

Harry didn't know what to say. He looked at the lieutenant. While he always seemed to be a company man with very little spine, Callahan realized Bressler had never failed him. He never closed the door or pulled the rug out from any of his men.

"So you've got nothing for me," Harry finally said.

"Not even the time of day," Dressier retorted, looking at his watch. "I've got a press conference in less than five minutes and I don't want you within five miles of this place, *capisch*?"

Harry nodded and rose, stopping midway to the door. Bressler's mentioning of a press conference set off an alarm in the back of his mind. In order to cover his sudden brainstorm, he turned back toward his superior's desk. "Lieutenant." He waited until Bressler looked him in the eye. "Thanks," he said sincerely.

Bressler nodded. "Get lost, Harry," he advised. "Go underground."

Sidney Melchior was late for the press conference. True, he had a lot on his mind, but that was no reason for him to be tardy for what could turn out to be the most volatile, interesting, and progressive media event of the year. Progressive, he thought, because finally the police were being made truly aware of the homosexual's major place in this city.

If he was going to be late, then at least he had a good reason for it. He had been up half the night writing an eyewitness account of what occurred at the SAFE meeting and was up the other half thinking of the concise, controversial, and embarrassing questions he was going to ask the commissioner, chief, captain, and lieutenant.

He readjusted the shoulder strap on his carryall, pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his small nose and ran his fingers through his black hair. Struck by a new thought, he hoped the batteries on his tape recorder weren't running down as he reached the top step of the Justice Building and ran inside. Well, it was too late now.

The lobby was almost completely deserted. It had to be because everyone was at the press conference. He only hoped he could still get a decent seat as he walked into a waiting elevator and pressed the button for the seventh floor. If the press conference ended before three, he could probably get back to the *Advocate* office and get the piece written in time for the four-thirty deadline.

MelcMor's mind was swarming with these thoughts as the elevator doors opened on the seventh floor. He didn't notice a tall man in brown tweed blocking his way to the conference room. "Excuse me," the preoccupied reporter said brusquely, trying to sweep around the obstruction. The man took Melchior by the elbow and easily swung him around in the other direction. The stranger shoved him down the hall in the opposite direction.

"But the press conference . . . ," Melchior complained, still craning his neck away from his chaperone, still unaware as to his identity.

"Change of plans," Harry Callahan told him. "I want to give you an exclusive interview."

The inspector practically threw the reporter into a plain, small room, lined with white cork. He came in behind Melchior, slipping a

card into the special holder on the door which read, INTERROGATION IN PROGRESS, DO NOT DISTURB.

Melchior's case hit the table in the middle of the room and slid down its length. The reporter himself had to grab the edge to keep from falling. He fell heavily into a chair, his glasses slipping down his nose again.

"Jesus!" he cried out, not without a touch of fear. "Inspector Callahan . . . !" he finally realized, then grew indignant. "What's the meaning of this? How dare you push me around."

"Shut up," said Harry casually, moving up beside the reporter. "I should have done a lot more, considering what you did to me last night."

"What I did to you? It seems to me you dug your own grave, friend. Now you'll just have to lie in it."

"Maybe," Harry considered. "But if you hadn't opened your big mouth, none of this would have happened."

Melchior couldn't disagree. "I was merely making Mr. Steele aware of your presence. I thought it best, considering the circumstances."

"What circumstances?" Harry inquired. "Why shouldn't I be there? If a reporter from the *Advocate* can be there, why can't a cop?"

"I hardly doubt if we were there for the same reason," Melchior scoffed.

"You never know," Harry said while looking at the ceiling.

"Come now," the reporter sniffed. "You don't expect me to believe that you're homosexual, do you?" When Callahan didn't answer, Melchior considered the possibility, but laughed it off. "Besides," he professed. "I was objectively observing. You were spying. I simply informed Mr. Steele of that fact."

"I like that," Harry said with amusement, shaking his head. " 'Watch out, he might have a gun'?"

Melchior remembered. "Oh yes. I see what you're getting at. Well. What can I say? I was in the throes of passion, so to speak. It was the spirit of the moment, I suppose. I'm sorry."

Harry leaned in, his hands on the tabletop and chair back, his face inches from Melchior's. "You set me up," he accused the reporter. "Why?"

"Now see here!" Melchior flared, pushing back in the seat. "I've had just about enough of this. You know damn well that what you're doing here is illegal!"

Harry spread his arms out. "All we're doing is talking. Nothing illegal about that."

“Well, that’s fine,” Melchior huffed, collecting his material. “The conversation is at an end,” he declared, walking toward the door with his arms full of equipment. He found Harry in his way again. “Stand aside, Inspector,” he said sternly. Harry didn’t move. “Did you hear what I said?” Still no movement.

Unable to look him in the eye, Melchior made his ultimatum, quaking. “All I have to do is walk down this hallway and tell your superiors what you are doing and you’ll lose your pension so fast it’ll make your head swim!”

“But first you’ve got to get down the hallway,” Harry told him quietly.

Melchior stepped back, still unable to look Harry in the eye. He shakily moved to the table, dropped his gear and sat again. He purposely looked away from Harry, ashamed of his own cowardice, his fists clenched. “I could write about this, you know.”

“And I’d still lose my job,” Harry agreed, approaching. “But then it would be just you and me with no badge between us to protect your rights.” Harry sat down across the table from the abashed reporter. “What would happen to you then with no pension protecting you from me?”

Melchior looked up into Harry’s assured eyes. “You wouldn’t dare.” But his tone betrayed his bravado.

Callahan sighed. “Who believes what they read in the papers? Who believes in what they see on T.V.? Who believes anything, anymore?” Then, with a swiftly savage swipe, Harry sent the table between them off the floor, and smashing into the back wall. It happened so suddenly that Melchior jerked in his chair, almost falling backwards. When he looked back from the toppled table, he saw Harry was standing in its stead.

“I’ll tell you who believes,” he said. “I’ll tell you who believes that murder is murder and rape is rape and murderers and rapists should be punished for it, not written about or filmed or interviewed or glorified. I’ll tell you.”

As quickly as he had knocked the table aside, Harry reached down and pulled Melchior out of his seat. “I’ll tell you that there’s a girl missing. A girl who had just been raped the night before. A girl who might be the next victim of this Mortician Murderer, as you call him, unless we find her.”

Harry loosened his grip and let Melchior fall back into his chair. Watching him wipe the beads of perspiration from his face, the inspector returned to his own chair. “Now it’s your turn,” he said carefully. “You tell me all you know about last night and Michael

Peter Steele.

CHAPTER

Ten

Deep in Mission Park, between Castro and Delores Streets, was a theater. It was originally built to house an electronics clearing-house. The owners had built it on the prospect of being one of the first major centers for the latest in technology. They had spent a lot of money fashioning the squat, multi-roomed, one-storied building, and filling it with the newest advances in the electronics field. They worked very hard stocking it with everything from fifteen watt light bulbs to the most complex microprocessing chip.

Shortly after completion, they came back to find most of it missing. No matter how advanced their alarm system, no matter how strong their steel bars and metal grates, it seemed as if equally enterprising vandals had made off with everything but the building itself.

The owners threw up their hands and slapped a Chapter Eleven bankruptcy blanket over the place. They opened a video store near Van Ness and offered up the hollow Mission Park location at a veritable sacrifice. No businessman would touch it, but a company called GETT—the Growing Enlightenment Theater Troupe—was willing to take the building, provided that the owners left what little remained of the electronic fixtures.

GETT moved into one of the most technically advanced showcases of its kind, putting on plays for the last eight months that were monumental in their ambitiousness as well as pretention. All were original works that strove to illuminate cosmic struggles.

Harry should have been clued to the actual producers behind the place by the name of the repertory company. GETT was another catch-as-catch-can name that it seemed SAFE specialized in. M. Peter Steele was at his fund-raising best here, collecting dues and contributions from the homosexual community in the name of civic awareness with which he produced, directed, and usually co-wrote the shows under a variety of florid stage names.

At least that was what Sidney Melchior had told him. The reporter professed to knowing nothing manipulative about the SAFE meeting last night—honestly pointing Callahan out only because of the fear brought on by Steele's rhetoric. As for Steele himself, Melchior had a wealth of intimate knowledge, having followed and given good press

to his movement since its inception.

Even with all his first hand information, the reporter could think of very few specific places Steele could go to hide. And since no one knew about SAFE'S controlling interest, the theater seemed ideal. Harry knew Steele's own Lafayette Park apartment was being staked out. At least the force didn't know about the theater, so it seemed a likely place to start looking.

Emerging from his car in the shadow of the small, simple, Indian-built Mission Delores on Sixteenth Street, Callahan wondered what had sent a woman like Lisa Patterson into this neighborhood. She had been a well-respected designer; creating windows for department stores, conceiving interior decorations for some of the city's wealthiest citizens, as well as doing scenic and costume designs for various professional theater and opera companies.

As Harry opened the trunk and pulled out a small tire iron, he figured that Steele must pay his crew well or perhaps Patterson just enjoyed contributing her time to what she saw as a good cause. Maybe she told herself that she was working toward the enlightenment of the masses—that she was striking a blow for the movement which would make their lot easier in the future.

Slipping the metal inside his jacket across from his shoulder holster, Harry moved down the side street toward the seemingly deserted structure. Large indentations in the front wall which should have been windows were merely inlayed cinder block. What glass was there was thick, square, and opaque.

The wind whipped around the one-story building, thin, greyish clouds contorting above the roof like wringing hands. The threat of more rain was in the late afternoon air and a pall hung over the autumnal city. The mood was oppressive. Harry couldn't see if and how Steele fit into the lesbian slaughter. Why would an avowed and devout homosexual—one dedicated to brotherhood and fair play—take a shovel to the face of a female ally?

The cop shrugged the theorizing away as he neared the side of the building. Nobody else was on the street. Harry wandered alone to the rear of the theater, bringing out the short crowbar as he went.

The back door was easy. There was only a Master lock in addition to the inadequate door lock holding the obstruction closed. Harry pushed the narrow metal bar between the body and clasp of the lock and pulled down. The securing device snapped open with hardly a complaint. Harry pulled the broken lock from its mooring, Slipped it in his outside jacket pocket and put the crowbar back inside.

Looking around, he slipped his free hand onto the Magnum. His

hand froze when he saw three black children walking down the sidewalk across the street from him. There was a chance the kids wouldn't notice him. They kept walking down the street.

Harry's right hand slid off his .44 and moved down to the loose doorknob. His other hand pulled a credit card which he kept for just such occasions.

Slipping the plastic sheet between the frame and the knob, he heard the tumblers move back comfortably. The door opened a crack. With a shove, he pushed it open, swung around, and slipped inside.

He sensed a shadow dropping on him from out of the darkness above. All his senses combined to pinpoint the attacker. He heard the rustle of fabric as the figure fell. He felt the subtle displacement of air. He saw the movement of the dark curtains behind him.

Harry grit his teeth and swung the crowbar back in a vicious arc. He felt the metal hit its mark.

The figure flew back into the slightly open door, slamming it shut. The light from outside was cut off, plunging the entry into darkness.

Harry dug into his pocket for his lighter. The flame illuminated the figure. Harry found himself looking into the blank, featureless face of a stage dummy.

It had arms and legs and was rudimentarily clothed in a T-shirt and shorts, like the kind the police department used for its rescue tests. Harry stood, expressionless, holding the lighter up to see a pulley unit attached to the door. It was set so that if the partition was open, the dummy would fall, much the same way as a bucket of water would drop on an unsuspecting mark.

Callahan grinned. Remembering the kids outside and the establishment's break-in record, he assumed that this little piece of scare theatrics was meant to chase any juvenile delinquent away. Harry had to admit it certainly did the trick. He had just knocked the thing out cold.

Straightening, Harry extended the wavering flame, trying to break the dark by more than a couple of inches. Everything was still decked in darkness, both from the natural gloom and a wealth of hanging black scrim. He checked the wall around the doorway but couldn't find a light switch. He moved deeper into the building.

Callahan proceeded cautiously, sliding his feet forward and keeping the tiny flame low. He didn't want to blind himself or make his presence apparent by holding the lighter right up to his eyes. He sidled forward until he heard a board creak not ten feet in front of him.

His thumb went off the lighter immediately and the darkness again became complete. Harry stopped moving and held his breath, giving his hearing full attention. Whatever had made the noise seemed to be doing the same. Harry wanted to pull out his gun, but didn't want the sound of sliding leather to tip his hand. So he waited.

The flooring creaked again, this time off to his right. The noise was abruptly cut off, as if the offending foot had jumped instantly off the agitated board. Harry's eyes narrowed and his own foot moved forward. Rather than lift it up to set it down again, he slid it, keeping as much even weight on both feet as possible.

For several minutes, Harry continued his slow progress, carefully moving to the left of the last creaking noise. He kept going until a gun was thrust between two hanging scrims directly in front of him.

His eyes had adjusted enough to see the gleam of the revolver slowly appearing between two scrim edges. It seemed to grow right out of the curtain, rising in front of Harry's torso like a plant.

It was a stainless steel .357 Magnum Security Special. It was a special gun, all right, a compact, fairly accurate weapon used mostly by experts. The stock was specially contoured walnut that had finger grips and its five powerful rounds nestled between a fully shrouded two and a half inch barrel and an inertial pin-hammer drop block. It was a serious weapon, good only for serious damage.

Harry instantly grabbed it by the chamber and snaked his fist through the curtains to grab whoever was behind it. Whoever it was tried to pull the gun away, not counting on Callahan's vise-like grip. Ducking his other hand, they then tried to pull the trigger. But Harry's hand kept the chamber from turning. The hammer couldn't go back if the chamber didn't position a new round in front of the pin. It was an effective safety as long as one's fingers didn't slip.

Harry pushed himself forward immediately, trying to twist the Security Special out of the hand holding it. The gun holder used Harry's attack to his advantage, pushing one leg between Harry's and twisting to the side. It was an old, but effective self-defense move—one that pushed Harry across the gun holder's hip and knocked him over.

Half-spinning, half-flipping to the ground, Harry couldn't maintain his grip on the gun. Knowing he was going to lose it, Harry threw all his weight into the fall, allowing his body to completely flip, landing on the floor halfway through a backward somersault.

The .357 boomed just above him, the bullet burrowing into the wood between his feet as he stopped in a crouch. Knowing he didn't have enough time to pull out his .44 before the .357 got off another

shot, Harry sprang up from his position. He caught his attacker around the waist just as the Security Special's trigger was pulled a second time.

He felt his quarry's arm over his back as well as the sizzling trajectory of the bullet. The bulk of lead went over him, but tiny slivers of its shrapnel sliced through his jacket and into his lower back, making powder burns on his skin. He ignored the fleeting pain as they both flew into a hanging black curtain, bringing it down with them as they slammed back onto the floor.

The cloth billowed over them as rope and sections of the top wood frame fell across them both. Harry kept his concentration on his opponent's gun hand, wrapping all his fingers around it as if he were trying to strangle the wrist.

Harry was on top of the pile with his right leg holding down his opponent's left arm while his other knee pressed against the throat. The gun holder bucked while Harry slammed the gun hand repeatedly against the floor—the scrim blocking his vision. He kept slamming and kept squeezing until it seemed as if his adversary's thin wrist would shatter in his hand. Like a flower slowly blooming, the fingers reluctantly opened, the .357 clattering to the floor, amid the cushioning curtain.

Callahan released the wrist and scooped up the fallen gun. Then, pulling himself back, he prepared to get off his exhausted foe. In order to stand, Harry put his other hand back to get his balance. His palm landed on his adversary's chest.

"McConnell," he said into the darkness.

He was answered by silence at first, but finally a familiar voice replied with as much relief as irritation. "Well, it's not the Avon Lady."

Harry pulled the black curtain off the vice cop and helped her to her feet. She dusted off the back of her jeans and straightened the dark red and blue plaid shirt she was wearing. They were standing in a small clearing to the side of the hanging scrims. Harry could see a series of ropes tied to a long bar along one wall, a lighting board along another, and the main stage through more scrims to his left.

"Good guess," McConnell said tersely, lightly rubbing her hand.

Harry didn't have to ask her what she was doing here. She was well versed with Patterson's lifestyle to guess the GETT Playhouse might have something to do with her death. But he did ask her quietly how she found out about the Steele connection.

"When you were told to hit the road, I hit the ceiling," she quipped, with just as much seriousness as humor. "All it took was some

judicious grilling of a few lesbian cruisers. They're acting tough, but it's obvious they're scared. Their fear of the Mortician Murderer is greater than their hate of us."

Harry nodded. They'd do anything to see the killer caught, even squeal on a fellow homosexual. "Find out anything?"

"I just got in the front with a lock pick when I heard the back door slam," she admitted. "All I've seen so far is a side hallway and your crotch on my neck."

Harry looked to the stage, handed back her .357, and pulled out his own Magnum. "Let's tear this place apart," he said. "I'm not leaving here without some sort of clue."

"I'm with you, Harry," she said.

They both walked out onto the stage, their guns at their sides, when a powerful spotlight pinioned them. Bright white light burst across their features as the huge kleig lamp groaned with released energy. Both were blinded, the illumination seeming to go right through their heads.

McConnell twisted down to the floor, turning away from the light. All she saw was a white fuzzball, as if she were being held in place by a feather mattress. Harry raised his gun and felt like he was about to shoot the sun.

He pulled the trigger just as he heard the scream growing from the opposite side of the stage. The Magnum boomed and bucked, followed by the explosion of shattering glass and broken filaments. The theater went dark again.

Both the girl and cop heard the explosion of the gun from the catacomb of dressing rooms.

"That's it, then," Kim said. "They've found us." She looked up from the chair at the man with the mustache, who no longer had his police uniform on. "Did you bring Michael to the new place?"

"Sure," he said, checking the knots that kept her bound firmly to the seat. "He bought the story of Callahan coming after him hook, line, and sinker. But are you sure the others will do as you say?"

"They're hardly more than zombies now," she answered hurriedly. "All they can do anymore is follow orders. Now hurry up and gag me. You've got to clear out in case they survive."

"In case?" the young man echoed incredulously, picking up the electrical tape. "You pumped those homos so full of PCP they couldn't hit the broad side of a barn."

"Maybe," she countered. "But they're also so high they're suicidal."

Before she could say more, the cop started stuffing her mouth.

When he finished, he smiled, then started to hit the bound and gagged girl as hard as he could.

Harry could only fight by instinct when the fuzzy, burnt-out shape of a running man came at him from the wings. As he got closer, it became clearer that he was holding a huge double-edged broadsword above his head.

Harry thanked Providence for making the idiot scream because that pinpointed him in the dark. Callahan moved back, put his leg out and swung the Magnum down. The scream was enhanced when the attacker tripped on Harry's leg and then cut off when the gun smashed into the side of his head.

He vaulted over Harry's limb, diving in front of the cop's chest, the sword flying out of his grip. The man awkwardly hit the floor, rolled, and collided with the bottom of the proscenium arch. The sword hit the wood point first, bounced, and spun into the orchestra pit.

Harry's head jerked toward it in confusion just as a second spotlight went on from the other side of the balcony. Harry crouched, swung the Magnum up. The second blast of the .44 did to his ears what the lights had done to his eyes. But it wasn't enough to cover the sound of a flat being lowered from above.

Dropped was more like it. Harry squinted up, seeing several wood and painted canvas panels weighted with a metal bar falling toward him.

"Watch out," he shouted to McConnell, then leaped forward, the steel pole just missing his shoulder. The entire piece of flat scenery collapsed on the stage, Harry standing in front of it, McConnell sitting behind.

McConnell scrambled backwards, but couldn't avoid the bar hitting her calf. She shouted in surprise and pain as Harry moved to help her. He was forced back by another flat. And then another and another.

Looking up, all either could see were the dropping, stage-wide pieces of sets. Harry pulled himself sideways as another fell, grazing his chest. He ran back toward McConnell as a fourth one slammed down just where he had been standing.

He reached McConnell in time to slap both his hands against the metal bar of the falling fifth, which was heading right for the woman's head. His strength was enough to knock the steel tube behind McConnell's head, although he couldn't keep the ruffling canvas and wood frame from hitting her torso.

But the flat was thrown off course far enough for him to see that the three ropes which were attached to the top frame were held together by a pulley which led to the offstage section they had fought in earlier. Harry remembered the ropes tied in that open section. The black scrims which kept the audience from seeing backstage did the same for the police.

Harry immediately started shooting in that direction. The curtains jerked up as the bullets hit them, giving him glimpses of the far wall before they dropped again. He heard a frightened shout and then the flats stopped falling.

A sandbag flew past Harry's shoulder. Surprised it was enough to send him down hard to the stage floor. He landed on his side and twisted on his back just in time to see another brown bomb hurtling toward him. He rolled over, feeling the sack sliding across the hairs on the back of his head.

The force of its weight was enough to shake the stage boards and Harry's skull as he continued rolling forward. The sandbags were now falling in a more random pattern. He was able to roll to a crouching position just as McConnell started shooting.

She had seen the men on the metal catwalk high above the stage which stretched from wall to wall. It ended with a circular staircase on either side. There were two bombardiers, each throwing the heavy sacks as fast as they could lift them.

When the .357 slugs began ricocheting off the cross-hatched metal floor, they kicked the remaining bags off the walk and ran for a different staircase. The man on the left hadn't gotten one step when McConnell's fourth shot sailed into his leg. He stumbled, fell sideways, and hit the thin wooden bannister. The wood splintered and the terrified man fell forty feet to the hard stage below.

Harry ran up just as she was aiming at the second man. "Hold it," he instructed her. "He's got no place to go." As they both watched, the man tripped on the first step and fell face first. His nose was all but sliced off by the edge of the metal steps and he continued to smash brutally down the steps until he picked up too much speed to maneuver a corner.

His broken body spun off the stairwell and somersaulted through the air. He landed on his back.

The dust from the two falling men hadn't settled when all the theater lights went on. The entire theater shone with a crystalline brightness. Callahan and McConnell were standing centerstage at the bottom of a low pit. Rising on all sides at the edge of the stage were simple red seats. It was a low capacity theater with seven sections.

Between each section was an aisle, with only two aisles ending at the exit. Above the center section was a thick, dark, plate of glass. Harry guessed that was from where the lights were being controlled.

On either side of the glass pane, at the top of the respective aisles, were the two spotlights with their fronts shattered. Behind the devices were two men, each holding a shotgun pointed at the stage.

The cops reaction was instinctive. The .357 and .44 came up as one. All four pulled their triggers at once.

The resulting report echoed like a train crash. Harry and McConnell stood, nothing touching them. Harry's man jerked back against the wall, the .44 slug having gone into the left side of his chest. The force with which he fell was so great that he pulled the spotlight back with him. The man slid to the ground and the hot, smoking piece of equipment fell on top of him.

McConnell's man clutched at his arm, dropping the rifle and stumbling out from cover. He quickly tried to retrieve the weapon as Harry shouted.

"Don't be a fool!"

The man was down on one knee, bringing the shotgun up to his shoulder. McConnell pulled the trigger again. It clicked empty. The man pulled his own trigger. Nothing happened.

"Hold it," Harry said, aiming his weapon. The man looked at the shotgun as if it were an alien thing. Harry leaped off the stage just as the wounded man was forcing the pump of the shotgun back. The cop took the stairs three at a time as the man expelled the spent shell and released the pump—automatically feeding a new one into the chamber.

Harry got within twenty feet of him when the wounded man started to aim the shotgun straight at him. The look on his face was that of a child confused and frustrated. Harry had no choice. Still running, he shot the man in the chest.

The man's smiling, triumphant face froze as he flew backward, his body retaining its sitting position. He landed two steps up. Harry came to a stop over him. He recognized the face. His face reminded him of the man who had talked to him in The Third Degree bar on Tenth Street. It was the man who had cryptically warned him about the impending trouble.

Callahan turned to see McConnell coming up the stairs after him, reloading her gun. Turning back, with determination coloring his features, Harry pointed the Magnum at the black glass of the lighting booth and fired the last bullet. The suddenness of his action made McConnell stop and wince.

He shot it high enough into the pane so as not to hit anyone who might be inside. Since he didn't have time to find the entrance, Harry decided to climb through the shattered window. The .44 calibre slug had created a network of cracks around its big hole, but it hadn't shattered the obstruction. Putting the Magnum back in his holster, Harry grabbed the heavy spotlight, and pulled it off the stair with a grunt. Then, using all his strength, he pushed it into the glass.

It collapsed like a waterfall, a glistening cascade of black glass instead of a sheet of liquid. Shards splashed and sparkled across the floor of the little booth, sliding across the light board, tape recorders, and several plush black chairs. The booth was empty, a door leading out to the left was open.

Harry turned to find McConnell at his side. "Call headquarters," he said. "I want an immediate autopsy of every one of these men."

"White is still working on the McLaren job," McConnell reminded him.

"I don't care who does it, as long as it's done," Harry said intensely.

"Take it easy, Harry," she reproved mildly. "Anything you want to know we can get from the swordsman there." She pointed toward the edge of the stage and both looked in that direction. The man who had attacked Harry with the broadsword was gone.

McConnell turned back in wonderment. "Maybe the man who was dropping the flats got him . . ."

"Or maybe the one who was in here," Harry said. "It doesn't matter. Go call HQ, Sergeant. An immediate autopsy, you read me?"

"Loud and clear," McConnell said. Before she left, she turned to Harry one last time. "You sure you don't want me to accompany you back there?" she asked, motioning with her head at whatever lay beyond the lighting room door.

Harry nodded, looking at the booth instead of her, so she just shrugged and went out the back. Along the way, she stopped to examine the sword the disappeared attacker had dropped. To her surprise, it was light when she picked it up. Made of painted wood, she discovered. It was a prop.

Harry found what he was looking for in the third dressing room behind the booth. She was brutally bound to a chair which was screwed to the floor itself. Her wrists and thumbs were tied together behind her back with rubber coated wire. Her shoulders and elbows were bound to the back of the chair with wire and tape.

More wire and tape were used to secure her ankles and knees apart on the chairs' front legs. The cords cut cruelly into her skin at all

points because her pants had been stripped from her before she was tied. She had struggled desperately by the looks of it because streams of dried blood colored her hands and feet.

She was further held to the chair by a wire encircling her waist and silenced by tape wound around her head and hair repeatedly. When Harry cut it away, he found a sponge taped in place over her knotted pantyhose which was forced between her lips.

The fading bruises of the rape were joined by brand new ones which split her lower lip and nearly closed one eye. Her sweater was practically torn off her body with many more welts beneath the tears on her torso. A wide, custodial broom had its base propped against the dressing room wall in such a way that the handle was pushed between Kimberly Byrnes' outstretched legs.

Harry looked around for something to use as a tool; spotting a screwdriver in the corner, he worked feverishly to unbolt the chair from the floor. When he finally pulled all the screws up, he slowly, gingerly moved the seat back from the wall.

When the broom clattered to the floor, Kimberly Byrnes groaned.

CHAPTER

Eleven

"It was horrible," she said.

Kim Byrnes was sitting up in the hospital bed, most of her head covered with bandages. Her skin was a light shade of blue. Steve Rogers, the black police doctor who took care of most of Harry's wounds, described it all in the hall before the combination visit and gentle interrogation.

"By all outward signs, she was beaten continually. When he wasn't hitting her with an open hand or his fist, he was whipping her with something. A thin leather belt, I should think. Very little else would make those kinds of markings."

"Anything else?" Harry said needlessly.

Rogers thought he knew what he was referring to. "No physical damage due to the . . . uh . . . object. It probably caused nothing more serious than a case of shock. In fact, Harry," the doctor said in a consoling tone, "other than the immediate surface damage, she's not badly hurt."

Callahan looked at him.

"No, really," Rogers contended. "The way I figure it, Steele's killing rage was spent by the murder of the Mayer girl. But since he had a second girl hostage, he took his minor frustrations out on her. That way, his anger didn't have a chance to build. There're contusions and lacerations, but no concussion or broken bones as far as we can ascertain."

"Then she'll be OK."

"Good as new. Officially, we're planning to release her tomorrow morning. But in fact, she could go home anytime."

Callahan thanked him and entered the private room, which was already occupied by Captain McKay, Lieutenant Bressler, Alex Wu, Lynne McConnell, and, of course, Kim Byrnes.

"I can't remember what happened very clearly," she admitted.

"Of course not, my dear," McKay clucked, seated in the one chair, which was moved up to the girl's bedside.

"What happened after the fight started?" McConnell asked, getting a

dirty look from the captain and a concerned one from Wu.

Byrnes looked down at her hands, which had swaths of gauze around her wrists, making her look like she had attempted suicide. Her small, shapely fingers, their fingernails for the most part intact, lay on the sheet over her torso,

"All I can remember was running out the back door," she said slowly, having difficulty bringing it all back. "I think we kept running until we were alone. Then I think I can recall his face . . ."

"Steele?" Bressler asked.

She nodded. "But I'm not sure." Her hand raised toward the back of her head, but returned to the bed. "Then I felt something on my head and I blacked out."

McKay turned to look at Bressler. "The two split off from the rest of the crowd where they met Steele. Then she was knocked out and he beat the other girl to death." The way he spoke made it sound as if he were filling the lieutenant in on the "official" version—the one that was going to be on Steele's warrant request.

"Where was that?" McConnell asked her directly.

Byrnes looked blank. "I don't know. We just ran and ran."

That fit, Harry thought. They had found plenty of blood inside the Mustang, but it was hard to tell whether she was beaten to death there or somewhere close by. "Do you remember any cars?" he asked her himself.

She turned her head to look at him, her one uncovered eye gleaming in warm recognition. "Harry," she said warmly, as if welcoming him. Only then did she consider the question. "There were cars . . ." she started hesitantly.

"There," said McKay abruptly, "you see, Inspector?" He changed his irritated attitude when he solicitously returned his attention to the girl. "Now what happened after that?"

She stared off toward the opposite wall again, as if she were trying to see it all on a movie screen—to separate herself from the experience. "I woke up with him slapping me," she said with certainty.

"Steele?" Bressler had to interrupt again to make sure. Obviously the girl didn't want to remember her torturer by name. She nodded again, taking a second to look at Bressler; then returning her gaze to the far wall. While she continued, Detective Wu took the lieutenant aside. When they returned to the bed, Bressler did not interrupt again.

"He slapped me many times, asking me to cry. Then he'd stop, only to start hitting me. He did that again and again and again. He'd slap

me and then stop. Then he'd come back and hit me. Then he'd start all over again. After awhile, it seemed like he got tired of that. He came in and started hitting me with his belt." As she spoke, her head stayed perfectly still and her eyes stayed wide open, but big teardrops started streaming down both cheeks.

"Where were the others?" McConnell asked in empathy.

McKay whirled around and snarled at her. "She was gagged, wasn't she? Stop your damn interruptions!"

"No," Byrnes said quickly, looking at the captain. "It's all right. I want to help all I can." She concentrated once more on the far wall. "I didn't see any others. It was just him going in and out, beating me . . . in and out . . ."

That phrase brought her back to the torture seat. "After awhile," she said as if in a trance, "he seemed to get tired of that too. Then he came in carrying something . . ." She shook her head minutely, like she was trying to get something loose. "And all the time," she continued in a small voice. "And all the time, he was talking to me . . ."

McKay was on it like a shot. "What did he say?"

"First, he swore at me and told me to cry or scream. I wanted to, but nothing came out. Then he kept saying that it was my fault. My fault . . ." She closed her mouth and swallowed. McKay and Bressler leaned in. "When he came in the last time, he said he had a big surprise for me." The sexual allusion was clear to everyone present, Harry thought.

"Then," she continued, "when he was fixing it, he said that I had been a bad girl and had to be punished. He said that it was my fault that he was a homosexual. He said that if I hadn't been gay, he'd be able to love me instead of all the boys. He said he hated the boys too, but it wasn't their fault. They didn't have a choice, he said, but I did.

"Then, when it was all set up, he started hitting me again, saying 'Isn't that nice? Doesn't that feel good . . . ?' " Her voice started to waver and crack. Detective Wu moved in quickly.

"That's enough, Kim," he said gently, reaching across Bressler to put his hand on her arm. "That's all we need to know for now."

That seemed to snap her out of it. She looked up at Wu with glistening eyes. "Did it help? Did I do all right?"

"Fine," he assured her. "You did great."

McKay slowly got up, moving behind Wu and stretching. "Well, I think that's all we need to know, period. Lieutenant, Inspector, Sergeant, would you join me in the hall, please?"

Kim looked over imploringly. “Does Harry have to go? I’d like to talk with him if I can.”

McKay looked over at the inspector with an expression that combined doubt, dislike, and what could only be termed as envy. But his face was solicitous when he again returned his gaze to Kim. “He’ll be back in just a few minutes, all right?”

Bressler followed McKay out tamely, but as Harry let McConnell go in front of him, she presented him with a look of skepticism. Whether it was about McKay’s assurance or Byrne’s selfless heroism, he didn’t know. All four huddled in the bright hospital hall.

“I think that does it, all right,” McKay said briskly, rubbing his hands together. “I want a warrant and an APB out on Steele immediately.”

Callahan spoke strongly. “We don’t have a clear cut motive.”

“You heard her, Inspector,” McKay said with exaggerated patience. “He blames lesbians for his homosexuality. It probably goes way back to his childhood.”

Harry looked to the others for confirmation. McConnell put the last nail in Steele’s coffin. “It has its precedents,” she mused. “He said it wasn’t the boy’s ‘fault.’ That’s a rather classic example of a gay placing the blame for his condition anywhere but on himself. It’s also a classic example of seeing women as things, rather than people. According to Steele, boys can’t control themselves, but women can.”

“We don’t have much proof . . .” Bressler said doubtfully.

“Are you kidding?” McConnell replied. “Just get that girl up on the stand and there won’t be a dry eye in the courtroom. She could convince a jury the Pope did it.”

McKay pinned the vice cop with a critical eye. “Sergeant,” he said coldly. “We are not railroading anybody, so do not give the impression in either word or deed that we are. Michael Peter Steele killed all those women and he nearly claimed another victim. Only I’m going to make sure it’s his last.”

“What about his men?” Harry asked. Everyone looked up in surprise as if they had forgotten he was there.

“What men?” the captain asked in return.

“The members of SAFE.”

“What about them?” McKay sniffed.

“Were they in on it? Did they help him?”

Their superior thought about it. “They probably thought they were protecting him from police killers. And when you came charging into

the theater, they were sure SAFE's Public Enemy Number One was out to get their leader. It hardly makes any difference in the long run anyway. Steele could've killed the lesbians on his own, and even if he got some help, the charges will be minor. No, Inspector, I'm after the big fish on this one. The head man!"

McKay turned to Bressler. "An APB on Steele and a warrant for his arrest, Lieutenant. Now." Then he turned briskly and walked away.

Bressler looked helplessly at the other two, shrugged, and followed the captain like an obedient dog. That left Harry and McConnell alone amidst the crush of doctors, nurses, patients, and interns.

"Looks like it's all over but the shouting," McConnell said, smiling.

Harry did not mirror the expression. "Looks that way," he said distantly.

McConnell misread his meaning. Thinking his mind was on Byrnes, she turned a little defensive. "Don't let me keep you, Inspector. I'm sure you have plenty of important things to do besides talking with a sergeant from Vice. Just let me say that it was a pleasure and an honor working with you again and the last thing I'd want to do is to keep your bait waiting."

Callahan looked at her blankly. She seemed to have more to say, but she turned heel abruptly and marched away. Harry watched her go, expressionless, then slowly moved toward the private room door. Wu and the girl were where they had left them. Byrnes was leaning over, talking conspiratorially to the rape squad detective, who was holding her hand in both of his.

When the inspector entered the room, Wu quickly rose, said a few soothing words to the girl and approached him. "She is very excited and very vulnerable right now, Inspector," he said quietly as Kim laid back and looked out the opposite window. "She has blanked most of the details out of her mind already, although she shows signs of blaming herself for everything that happened."

"What do you mean?"

"It may be why she is so eager to please," Wu explained. "She perhaps feels that if she can satisfy everyone, no one will have any reason to hurt her."

"Is that common?" Harry marveled.

"No, not common," Wu replied, looking at the bed, then back to Callahan again. "This is a very uncommon girl, Inspector. She has survived what could turn others into paranoid schizophrenics or manic depressives. And it seems that she has come to grips with her experiences in spite of repressing the most painful things.

“So be careful, Inspector,” the detective warned. “She will need constant support to believe in herself and not believe that it was her fault. I have suggested a variety of counseling programs, but the final decision rests with her.”

The Oriental had made it clear that he thought Harry could do some good or else he wouldn’t have confided in him. Harry nodded, putting out his hand. “Thank you,” he said. “I’ll do what I can.”

The detective took his hand and nodded in return before leaving. As the door closed behind him, Harry surveyed the scene with a policeman’s eye. The room was dark in the early evening dusk. The sunset had come suddenly, bathing the room in a golden glow. The light had been turned off during the interview, so the streaks of color reflected off the clouds was the only illumination in the room.

Kim had turned down the sheets on her bed, leaving her beaten body exposed. She wore only her underwear, which she had begged Detective Wu to bring in addition to some outer clothes. The lingerie was light, silky cream, its lace v-neck held on her breasts by spaghetti thin straps. Her right hand was by her head on the pillow. Her left across her stomach.

As her chest rose and fell slowly in the sunset-colored room, the air thickened in Harry’s nostrils. And when she turned her head to pinion Harry with her one blue eye, the effect was devastatingly sexy.

“They tell me you saved my life,” she said softly. “I wanted to thank you.”

Harry approached the bed. “You were my responsibility,” he said in way of explanation.

“Is that all?” she asked.

Harry stood next to the bed, across from the window—the light from the sunset coloring his features. “I don’t like innocent people hurt,” he said simply.

She smiled, reached out and took his hand. They remained like that for some time, both looking out the window at the sky.

When the colors faded she finally looked back at the tall, standing man.

“Harry,” she said. “Take me home.”

She was quiet all the way to his apartment. She stood outside his third floor door like a shy child on the first day of school. Only her body betrayed her. Once they had cleared her discharge with the hospital and Dr. Steve Rogers removed all superfluous bandages, she pulled a green wraparound skirt from her small bag, tied it around her, and

slipped on a pair of black T-strap heels.

She stood in his doorway now and even her bruised face couldn't remove the sensuality she exuded. She remained there longer than was necessary, as if she were afraid to take that last step. Harry pulled a beer out of his fridge and pulled a chair over to his couch to offer her a seat.

She finally came in and sat hesitatingly down, closing the door behind her.

"Would you like something?" he asked, holding up the beer.

She shook her head no.

Harry let it lie. With McKay pounding the bushes for Steele, Bressler back at headquarters taking everyone's heat, McConnell stewing over their adieu, and Devlin taking care of the inevitable loose ends, Callahan finally had some time to himself.

They sat in Harry's dark apartment in silence, the only light coming from the streetlamps outside and the last vestiges of the autumn sun.

"Harry?" she finally asked, her voice cracking. "Am I still pretty?"

He looked to see her framed in the light of the windows, her face in shadow.

"The only reason I ask," she continued apologetically, her voice getting hoarser, "is that I thought maybe those men were trying to stop me from being pretty so that . . . so that . . ."

She was crying again, her head in her hands by the time Harry got to her. She clung to him, crying herself out. Finally, the wave of emotion passed and she drooped against him, her eyes heavy. He lifted her easily and laid her on his bed. Her eyes closed as soon as her head hit the pillow.

Harry looked down at her, feeling very old. He didn't think there was a position in which she wouldn't look beautiful. Her youth, her lushness, even her wounds added vulnerability to her attraction. But Harry was no longer a loadstone. Beauty and love was not something he could have anymore. Everything that he had ever loved had been murdered.

He had loved a woman until she was killed by a drunk driver. He had loved the law until he saw it destroyed by liberals and idealists who gave the power to the criminal. A dead victim could not have rights. A victim could not plea bargain for a lesser sentence than death. A victim did not have the possibility of parole. The dead women in McLaren Park couldn't be reconstructed.

The only reason Harry came back to the police force after throwing his badge away was the realization that there were too few who

remembered. Everyone was so busy protecting their pensions, covering their asses, and looking out for Number One that they had no thought of justice. Wrong was wrong; and if Dirty Harry Callahan was going to be the only person who believed that, then so be it.

He went back to the kitchen, picked up another beer, sat on the couch, and stared at the floor, thinking. He thought about his partners, dead and alive. He thought about the people he had killed. He thought about the ones he had saved. And he thought about the dead women in McLaren Park. He thought about every single thing that had happened between the time he got the phone call from MacKenzie at the airport until now. He thought hard.

He looked up when he sensed a shadow in the darkness. There was a figure in his bedroom doorway. By that time, the streetlamps were the apartment's only illumination. Kim Byrnes stepped into it, her form-fitting negligee off one shoulder so one breast was exposed. She seemed oblivious to it.

"Harry," she called softly. "Please. Make love to me. I want to know what it's really like."

There were many tragedies in Harry's life, but surprisingly little sadness he told himself. His life had become a numb series of ugly events that had about as much effect on him as numbers had on accountants. But as he sat in his dark apartment, he felt a strange choking feeling in his throat. It was pitiable and deeply sorrowful.

Harry stood, put his beer down, and followed her into the bedroom with profound sadness.

CHAPTER

Twelve

The phone woke him from a dreamless sleep. Sleep was the only place he could retreat from the horrors of his life, so he didn't dream often.

He pushed himself up, seeing Kim sitting next to him with the sheets bunched about her neck, looking at the phone like it was a bomb.

Harry rolled over, got up and answered it.

"Yeah?" he croaked.

"Harry," said Al Bressler. "That you?"

"No," he said aridly. "It's not me."

"Christ, I know it's late Harry, but we've found him."

Callahan didn't have to ask who. "How?" he said instead, completely awake.

"A tip," the lieutenant revealed. "He said that we could find Steele in Trailer Twenty-two at that mobile home park on the hill beyond Mount Douglas."

"McKay get wind of it yet?"

"Hell, that's who the tipster called!" Bressler wailed. "He's marching on the park now with most of the Ninetieth Panzergrenadier Division!"

The lieutenant's angry sarcasm was easy to understand. McKay saw a way to shower glory on himself, so he cut off all the real investigators to lead the shock troops himself. And if Harry knew the captain, there wasn't a seasoned uniform or detective in the lot. He'd probably surrounded himself with nothing but S.W.A.T.

"On my way," said Harry.

"Meet you there," said Bressler.

They both hung up.

"What is it?" Brynes asked.

"Another case," Harry lied, pulling his pants on.

"Is it that important?" she complained, stretching like a satisfied kitten.

Harry stood, buttoning his shirt. “Every murder is important.”

“ ‘A man may work from sun to sun,’ ” she quoted agreeably. “ ‘But a detective’s work is never done?’ ”

“You got it,” said Harry, pulling on his shoulder holster and then his corduroy jacket. “Do you want to stay here?”

“I want to stay with you,” she replied yearningly.

Harry was moved. He didn’t want to leave her alone, but he certainly didn’t want to bring her along either. “You can’t,” he finally said. “Not on this trip.”

She bit her lower lip. “I guess I better go home then,” she decided.

“Will you be all right?” Harry asked solicitously. “I could take you back to the hospital.”

“No,” she said with conviction. “I’ll be fine. I can handle it.” She looked at the rumpled bedsheets with knowing pleasure. “Now.”

Harry would not be tempted. “Get dressed then.”

She went to his closet and pulled out his raincoat. She wrapped it around herself, its length covering her. “All set,” she reported.

He dropped her off at her apartment, insisting on walking her to the door. When she unlocked it, he entered first, checking all the rooms and turning on the lights. After she had entered, he moved out into the hall again, leaving her in the doorway.

“Keep it locked,” he said. “I’ll be back.”

“I’ll be waiting,” she said.

Harry pushed the corners of his mouth up and then jumped down the stairs four at a time by swinging on the bannisters like an athlete on the parallel bars. He got back into his car, pulling up the radio mike as he turned over the engine and slammed it into gear.

“Inspector Seventy-one reporting. Any word from the lab for me?”

“Nothing, sir,” the radio woman answered.

“Devlin report in yet?” he pressed.

“Not yet, Inspector.”

Harry slammed the receiver back onto its hook without so much as a “ten-four.” He broke all the Highway Patrol’s laws by speeding across the Central and James Lick Freeways to the junction of the Southern. He hardly slowed down on the Silver Avenue exit ramp, only barely braking at the stop signs. He got to the scene of the crime in record time.

It was like an instant replay of the murder excavation forty-eight

hours ago even up to and including the rain. Harry had seen droplets hitting his windshield but by the time he braked his car at the roadblock, it was coming down again in a regular torrent.

Even so, he pulled himself out of the car before it had come to a full stop and flashed his badge to the cop on duty there. “Lieutenant Bressler arrive yet?” he shouted over the noise of the wind and other car engines.

“Yes, sir,” the patrolman answered, pointing to a plateau some hundred feet up the Mount. “He’s at the Front Line.”

Callahan nodded. Trust McKay to treat the operation as an all-out war. Harry climbed up the side of the hill toward the ring of searchlights, S.W.A.T. trucks, police cars, and darkly dressed men with M-16s and sniper’s rifles. He found Bressler standing beside his car on the plateau’s blacktop. All around the vehicles were tipped and broken picnic benches, barbecue pits, and garbage cans. The wind caught the refuse and blew it whirlpool fashion above the site.

“What took you so long?” was the first thing the lieutenant shouted as Harry approached. He was wearing his regulation raincoat and a collapsible rainhat.

“Don’t start with me,” Harry warned, his own coat dry and warm back at Brynes’ apartment. “What is that idiot doing?”

“He gave Steele five minutes to come out.” He checked his watch. “Four minutes ago.”

“Where is he?” Harry asked in exasperation.

“Come on,” said the lieutenant, leading him to the end of the plateau, which was lined with cars parallel to the edge. Behind them were kneeling S.W.A.T. members aiming their weapons and Captain McKay holding a megaphone.

Harry saw that the trailer park was just below the plateau, nestled on the flat summit of a hill lower than the one they were on. Trailer Twenty-two was unlucky enough to be right on the northwest edge of the park, directly beneath the heavy guns. Looking over McKay’s shoulders, he saw that many other flak-jacketed gunmen were inside the park, their weapons bristling from behind every corner and every window.

The only area that wasn’t covered was the open field behind the trailer which led to the hill where the women’s bodies had been uncovered.

“Looks bad,” Bressler said.

“Looks terrible,” Harry countered.

Worse than that. As he finished speaking, McKay started. “All right,

Steele," he began. "This is your last chance. Come out with your hands up."

While he had been shouting through the bullhorn, Harry had moved up just behind him. "Been taking elocution lessons from Jack Webb, Captain?"

McKay whirled around, rain spinning off from his captain's hat. Harry could see under his raingear that he was wearing his best uniform. "Callahan! What are you doing here?"

"No offense, Captain," Harry replied. "But you're really fast with the clichés tonight."

McKay never learned. He insisted on being insulted by Harry's most innocent jibes, but he couldn't bring himself to bring up charges because he knew Harry just didn't care.

"Oh no, Callahan," he vowed. "Not tonight. I've got a wanted, dangerous criminal down there and not you or anybody is going to stop me from bringing him in." He turned back to the trailer, bringing up his megaphone.

"Dead or alive?" Harry asked.

McKay turned again, feeling the sting of Harry's words. "That man down there," he said slowly for the benefit of all those gathered, "has murdered more than a half-dozen women . . ."

"You think," Harry interrupted.

"What?" McKay said, confused, his train of thought interrupted.

"You think he murdered those women."

"We have the sworn testimony of an eyewitness!" the Captain yelled, looking at Harry as if he had lost his mind.

"We have the word of a woman who admitted that she was unconscious or delirious most of the time," Callahan reminded him. "He never admitted anything and she never actually saw him murder anyone."

Both the captain and the lieutenant were stunned by the words. For a few seconds, silence covered the plateau save for the pounding of the rain before McKay sputtered, "It doesn't make any difference. It doesn't make any difference. Steele is inside that trailer ready to shoot anyone that comes close. If he gives up, no one will be hurt. But if he resists, what would you suggest? Let him shoot us? He's got a bunch of his followers down there with him and they're all armed to the teeth!"

"Let me talk to him," Harry said.

"Not on your life!" McKay immediately retorted.

Callahan sighed, his hands at his side. “Either let me talk to him now, or explain why later.”

“I don’t have to explain myself to anyone!”

“Not if everything goes the way you want it,” Harry agreed, but then, smiling, added, “but how many times in your life has that happened?”

McKay was cunning enough to consider it. And once he did, he had to admit the painful truth in the inspector’s words. Abruptly, he pushed the bullhorn at Harry. Callahan quickly took it.

“Steele!” his voice boomed, echoing over the rolling park hills. “This is Inspector Harry Callahan. Sidney Melchior . . . introduced . . . us at a SAFE meeting.”

That was all it took. Through the sheets of rain, came the strong authoritative voice of the gay rights leader. “So you came to gloat, did you?” Steele surmised with the tone of a disgraced man who knew he was right all along. “Oh, we know you, Inspector. We know you very well. Now that your little plot has succeeded, you’ve come to watch the culmination, have you?”

“No!” Callahan replied, the word rolling over the area. “I have not plotted against you. But there is a conspiracy!”

McKay grabbed the top of the megaphone and pulled it down. “What the hell do you think you’re doing, Callahan?” he seethed. “Do you know what you’re saying?”

Bressler put his hand on the captain’s arm. “Negotiating tactic,” he explained. “You tell them anything just to get them out.”

“No,” Harry told them both. “No tactic. This is the truth.” He wrenched the bullhorn from beneath McKay’s grip and continued. “Only the police aren’t behind it. But the only way we can prove it is together. You have to help us.”

“Help you?” Steele called. “You must think we’re crazy!”

“No,” Harry answered. “Not crazy . . . but drugged.”

McKay looked at Bressler for some sort of explanation. The lieutenant just shrugged.

“Think about it, Steele,” Harry continued. “How long have you been taking that stuff? How long have you been giving it to your members?”

“Shut up!” Steele screamed. “I’m not imagining this! Angela Mayer was not part of my imagination!”

“No, she wasn’t,” Harry agreed. “She was really murdered, but by someone who knew about your Angel Dust habit. Someone who knew

what it could do."

"I didn't kill her, I tell you!" Steele's voice had become rough and high-pitched. Harry could practically smell the sweat from the trailer. "PCP only adversely affects those already violent."

"It can also make you depressed and paranoid," Harry added. "It could make you think that we—I—killed Angela."

"You did! You did! You had to!" Steele shrieked. But then his voice got small and distant. "Who else . . . if not you?"

"Why would I kill her?" Harry demanded. "Why would I kill any homosexual? You know my record. You know what I did to the Scorpio Sniper. And you know what he did to your people."

Bressler remembered the case that brought Harry to prominence. He remembered that the Scorpio Sniper had held the city for ransom, threatening at one point to "kill a queer or a nigger."

Steele remembered it too. "What do you want?" he wailed pitifully. "What do you want of me?"

"Come out," Harry said calmly. "Just throw away your weapons and come out. I promise nothing will happen. You have my word as the killer of the Scorpio Sniper."

It didn't work. Steele regressed to his original position, putting aside all that had been said in the meantime. "No. You'll kill me. You'll shoot us down in cold blood!"

Harry bit his lip and swore. He glanced over to see McKay beaming in triumph. Callahan instantly brought the megaphone back to his lips. "Then let me come in."

Bressler said it first. Then Steele's faraway voice echoed the word. Even McKay looked like he would have said it if his mouth hadn't dropped open.

"What?"

"Let me come in there," Harry said reasonably. "I'll come in with my hands up. You can keep me covered every second. All I want to do is talk."

Again, the only immediate answer was the roar of the rain crashing into the woods and reservoir.

"No," Steele said miserably. "It's a trick. It's got to be a trick. I won't let you come in. You can't make me!"

"That's enough," McKay announced, pulling the speaker away. "I hope you're satisfied, Inspector," he said directly up to Callahan's face. "All you've proven to me is that Steele could have very easily killed all those women. He's obviously as mad as a hatter." With that, the man

strode away to take up position at the far side of the plateau.

Bressler replaced the captain at Callahan's side. "Tough luck, Harry. You almost had him."

"He's not completely around the bend yet," Harry fumed. "I think I could still get him to see reason."

"If you could've gotten to him," Bressler commiserated.

"You don't understand, Lieutenant," Harry told him point blank. "I need Steele alive and I'm going to get to him whether he likes it or not."

"You've got to be out of your fucking mind, Harry," Bressler said, leaning over at the base of the hill and pulling at the grate covering with all his might. "Hell, what am I saying? I've got to be out of my fucking mind."

"You're not the one who's going to be crawling through the drainpipe," Harry reminded him, pulling alongside.

In the distance, both could hear McKay pontificating through the bullhorn. "This is my last warning. Either thrown down your arms and come out with your hands up or I can't be responsible for the consequences."

"Like hell you can't," Harry grunted, feeling the grate slip out.

"How can they come out with their hands up if they've thrown their arms down?" Bressler complained, tugging.

Harry ignored the joke and told him, "Keep pulling. We're almost there."

Harry had seen it at the last minute. As he stared at the trailer after McKay took the bullhorn back, he saw that the rain was draining through a grate just behind Trailer Twenty-two. It looked like a snug fit, but he was pretty sure he could navigate it. All he had to do was find where it emerged. Enlisting the lieutenant's help, they found its mouth and started working to pull its teeth out.

Light brown, bubbling water swept by their hands as they put their backs into it. Then suddenly, the rusty metal gave and the rectangular opening was clear. Or at least it was clear of metal. The liquid still coursed out as if the pipe was a hose turned all the way up.

"Ah. forget it, Harry," Bressler groaned. "It would be like swimming upstream in a toothpaste tube."

Callahan was tempted to do as Bressler recommended, but then he thought about the theory he had in mind. "I've got to try," he maintained, taking off his wet jacket.

“Why?” the lieutenant exploded. “What do you hope to gain? I heard your diatribe up there. It doesn’t make any sense. If Steele didn’t kill those women, why is he acting this way?”

“Because the ones who did kill them told him to.”

Bressler’s mouth closed. His police-trained mind took Harry’s sentence apart before he was able to fully understand it. Then his years on the force made him question the section of the sentence that didn’t quite fit. ‘Ones?’ More than one?”

“Two,” said Callahan, going through his coat’s pockets.

“Well, what the hell are you going scuba diving for? Tell McKay and let’s go get them!”

“I don’t have both their names,” Harry confessed. “And I don’t have any proof except Steele.”

Bressler saw Harry’s predicament immediately. They’d never be able to convince McKay that Steele must be taken alive. But if Harry was going to get to the truth, he had to squeeze between Steele and S.W.A.T.

And Bressler knew better than to try to disuade Harry when his mind was made up. “Then here,” he said, pulling a mass of plastic out of his raincoat pocket and holding it out. “It’s the closest thing I’ve got to a wetsuit.”

It was a light windbreaker. It fit perfectly over Harry’s shoulder holster. To further accelerate matters, Harry took off his shirt, leaving only the gun and the mack. Finally, he reluctantly pulled off his shoes.

“That’s the second pair I’ve lost on this case,” he grumbled.

“I’ll wait for you here,” Bressler promised.

“No,” Harry answered. “Make sure Commando Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen up there don’t blow me to bits when I come out.” The tired lieutenant threw up his hands and started trudging back to the plateau. “And if I don’t come out . . . ,” Harry called after him. He waited until Bressler turned before finishing. “. . . throw me a towel.”

Bressler crouched down, resting on his haunches in the still pouring rain. “Harry . . . if you don’t make it . . . what is the one name you do have?”

Callahan told him, took a deep breath and pushed himself into the small grating at the bottom of the hill.

CHAPTER

Thirteen

He had judged the current he was up against. Even so, it still didn't prepare him completely for the excremental debris that smashed into him, nor the pounding pressure in his brain when his lungs' oxygen supply got low.

Near the bottom, he was completely immersed in broiling liquid, the water trying to force him out of the pipe like spit. And even as he got further up the way, there was only a sliver of space at the top of the enclosure where he could suck in air—but not without getting a mouthful of noxious fluid as well.

It was like climbing up a mountain and swimming up a waterfall at the same time. His clothes became heavy. His fingers, toes, knees, and back became bloody as he scraped his way toward the top.

Twice he was knocked from his perch by a sudden surge of liquid, after which he'd have to claw and kick so as not to be hurled to the bottom again. He slid, grating his flesh along the walls. Taking a second to gather his breath, he started again.

When finally he reached the top, he realized he had completely forgotten about the metal grate secured there. Seeing it, he inwardly groaned, wrapped the fingers of one hand around it and held on. He hung there, the metal slats pouring water on him, wondering where the hell he was going to get the strength from to gain a secure footing to force it open.

Recalling the slaughter inside the theater gave him enough momentum to try harder. Spreading his aching legs to hold him fast in the tube, Harry let go of the grate in order to push at it. It didn't budge the first time, or the second. On the third, he felt a slight movement. Whether it was the metal or his arm, he didn't know.

His legs were throbbing in time with his heart. His arm muscles were vibrating uncontrollably. Completely spent, he stopped pushing, grabbed on, and let his legs dangle. Over the din of the cascading water he heard McKay giving his absolutely, positively, final, final warning.

"You have one minute, Steele," he proclaimed. "One minute to come out with your hands up . . . or we're coming in after you."

Harry shook some of the moisture off his head. That's the way, McKay, he thought. Little Ceasar would have been proud.

Harry executed a smooth chin-up and then spread his legs and arms so his back was right against the grate. There was some room on either side of his torso for the water to get past, but not enough so that it didn't build up weight. It was a race against McKay himself.

Harry pushed up with all his might. The grate started rasping out of its metal frame. He kept the pressure up until he felt it nearly give way. Suddenly he relaxed, letting all the accumulated water pass. Then he smashed upward again, the grate popping out of the way like a cork.

For a second, Harry lost his balance. For a moment, he was trembling on the edge of a bottomless pit. One that would send him down to the depths of failure. His head spun and he felt his limbs weaken, but he snapped back. Quickly, he grabbed hold of the edges of the frame and pulled himself through the coursing liquid.

Harry gulped clear, park air as he pushed himself all the way out. Exhausted, he lay next to the drain until he heard McKay let Steele know what time it was.

"Thirty seconds, Steele. Give up now while you still have the chance."

Harry scrambled to his feet and ran toward the rear of the trailer in a crouch. He could see as he approached that its axle was raised on eight sets of cinderblocks. He saw a foot and a half clearance beneath, he dove under.

Crawling forward, he judged the mobile home to be about sixty feet in length and twelve feet in width. There was a large septic pipe near the back and a variety of smaller pipes and faucets along its underbelly. In the front were two tanks of propane gas, which Harry assumed fed the stove. To the right of the septic tube was an adjoining tank of kerosene, which Harry assumed was for heating.

"Fifteen seconds, Steele," McKay's amplified voice came underneath, making the ground tremble. "You still have a chance if you give up now."

"Ten," McKay announced. "Nine. Eight . . ."

Harry forced the sound of the voice out of his mind as he tried to see someway to get inside the trailer short of kicking down the door. If all else failed, maybe he could get the drop on them that way, praying that they were too inexperienced and not too hopped up to fire.

"Seven. Six. Five . . ."

Harry crawled past the septic pipe, seeing exactly what he was looking for. A section of the undercarriage was being held up by some boxes. He slithered until he was right behind it and then kicked the supports out of the way,

"Four. Three. Two . . ."

The insulation between the floorings fell out, leaving Harry with a square hole where he could sit up. Above him were thin strips of nailed wood. He started ripping at those as time ran out.

"One." McKay finished. Following that was a moment of silence. "Zero," he added. Still no one made a move, except Harry, who had stopped using his hands and was swinging the butt of his gun to get the slats out of his way. "That's it, Steele," McKay vowed. "You won't get another chance. Come out now or we open fire!"

Above the wood was cemented tile. Harry pulled his feet and bended knees under him.

McKay turned from the edge of the plateau and handed the megaphone to Bressler. "That's it, then," he said in a calm, lower volume. "Order the tear gas in."

"But Inspector Callahan . . . ," Bressler complained.

"Callahan had his chance," McKay said in a monotone. "Just like Steele. Tell the S.W.A.T. teams that they can fire when ready." With that, McKay walked away from the front line, finding a spot to the side of the ranks to watch.

Harry stood up, using all his strength. He burst up through the kitchen tile, in between the open dining and living rooms. There were no doors between the sections so he could plainly see the seven men with rifles at a like number of windows. He didn't see Steele. He doubted the man would be firm enough to control a gun at any rate.

"Freeze!" he shouted loud enough so even the cops could hear him on the plateau.

"He made it," Bressler breathed, looking off to find McKay. But McKay had gotten into his car and closed the door. He hadn't heard anything. Bressler raced to find the shock troop commander so he could rescind the order to open fire.

As Harry had hoped, the seven men were taken completely by surprise. He recognized the one to his right immediately. It was the man who had held the prop broadsword. He looked a bit farther gone than the others. Sweat beaded on his forehead and his pupils were the size of microdots. He began to pull his rifle forward.

"Don't do it," Harry warned, bringing the Magnum around. "It's not worth it."

The man stared down the .44 barrel. His own weapon drooped as he leaned back against the wall, his knees to his chin. The others took that as a signal. They also relaxed, some falling with released tension, others simply sitting down, their heads between their legs.

"Hold your fire!" Harry bellowed at the top of his lungs. "It's over!"

"Hold your fire," Bressler told the S.W.A.T. leader, who stood to the far right side of the plateau.

"We have our orders," he said crisply, waving the first team on.

The man had ignored him completely. His lieutenant rank wasn't high enough to countermand a captain's instructions.

"Call McKay!" he demanded.

"Too late," the commander said indifferently.

The tear gas cannisters came through the left living room window as well as the front dining room pane. The latter of the two rolled into the kitchen and dropped into the hole Harry had just climbed out of. The other rolled under the couch.

"Go get it," Harry urged the one who was sitting above it. "Pass it here." He pointed to the hole he was standing over.

The man stood up. A bullet flashed into his head.

The window all but disintegrated under a hail of 7.65mm bullets. The slugs riddled his body. He fell forward, the top half of his head neatly shaved off. His brains spattered over the back of the couch and across the opposite wall.

Everyone fell to their faces except the broadsword man. To his addled mind, Harry was the one who brought this all upon them. He pushed himself onto his knees and brought the rifle up to his shoulder —the barrel pointed at the back of Callahan's head.

Harry turned to see the rifle sight and the man's eye perfectly lined up behind it.

His face set in an expression of regret, Harry fell to the side and pulled the Magnum's trigger. Both guns boomed and bucked at the same time. Harry flinched, but the man jumped back, hitting the wall hard enough to shake the entire trailer. He remained sitting up, his mouth and eyes open, a hole in his chest.

The others hadn't forgotten about their own guns as more lead and gas filled the trailer. They scooped them up and charged down the thin hallway along the left wall to get to the three rooms beyond Harry. Harry saw one man hit by a heavy millimeter slug that tore clean through the sheet metal, insulation, and wood paneling of the wall.

The last two turned on him. It seemed that the tear gas was on Callahan's side. It threw off the duo's aim, but he was still in a nasty crossfire between the dining and living rooms. Harry vaulted away from the hole toward the refrigerator along the left wall. He pushed it open in front of him as he shot the .44.

The bullet ripped through the last man in the dining room, spinning him against the front wall. Once there, S.W.A.T. slugs smashed him back onto the round table, which collapsed under his weight. The other police rounds, shattering bottles of salad dressing, soda, and ketchup on the open fridge door.

Harry ducked as the man in the living room started firing at the obstructing door as well. Eggs burst above Harry's head as he grabbed a gallon carton of milk. Remembering the place he saw the man last, Harry swung his arm around, sending the carton speeding into the living room. At the same time he bent over, pushing his gun between the bottom of the door and the floor.

The carton found its target. Harry threw it hard enough to smash into the man's stomach, ripping open the seams. White liquid splashed out both ends as he blasted the man in the right shoulder. The man jumped off the carpet, his gun flying into the stereo unit. He dropped heavily onto a chair, which tumbled backwards.

Harry was about to move forward when more S.W.A.T. slugs came spinning through the walls, sending him face first onto the floor.

"Cease fire, goddamn it!" he screamed in frustration.

Outside the trailer, Bressler tried to rip open the captain's car door —only to find it locked.

Bressler responded by slamming the side of his fist on the window hard enough to crack the glass.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" McKay demanded, rolling the damaged pane down. "What's come over you?"

"Order a ceasefire," Bressler demanded, breathing heavily. "Harry's in there."

"I'll do no such thing," McKay huffed.

Bressler reached into the car with both hands, grabbed McKay by his pressed lapels and bodily hauled him out of the car through the open window.

"Listen, you little bastard," he said, shaking his superior. "You order a ceasefire right now or I'm going to shove that megaphone right up your ass!"

Harry Callahan crawled through the trailer's narrow hallway, pushing dead and wounded men out of his way, his eyes streaming

tears. “Steele,” he called repeatedly, hardly able to hear himself over the screams of the artillery, the whine of escaping gas, and the heavy drum of the rain on the tin roof.

He forced himself through the bloody, misty morass, seeing through the open bedroom door. Inside, the surviving three men were blasting away through the windows at the army of anti-terrorist fighters outside. He had passed the spare room so that left only the bathroom unsearched. He stopped moving at the one door that remained closed.

“Steele?”

“Don’t come in here!” the man’s hysterical voice answered. “I’ve got a gun!”

“Steele,” Harry pleaded. “It’s me.”

The community leader’s reply was two bullets smashing through the doorway above the cop’s head.

“You can’t fool me!” he taunted. “I know who you are.”

The man’s screams and gunshots attracted the attention of the other men. Harry looked directly at them as they turned. “Don’t,” he yelled. “I’m on your side.”

“Don’t listen!” Steele countermanded. “Kill him!”

Harry shot first. The man directly in the bedroom doorway rolled across the bed, spilling blood across the rumpled yellow sheets. He fell heavily on the other side, taking a pillow with him.

Another man appeared in the doorway, screaming, his eyes tearing in the wispy gas. He was firing indiscriminately, not expecting Harry to be flat on the floor. He came so quickly that Harry didn’t have time to aim. He tripped him by letting him fall over his prone body.

The man’s shoe caught Harry across the chin and shoulder. He dropped on Callahan’s back as the cop slithered forward. The third man rose. Pulling himself onto his side, Harry shot him in the chin.

“All right, Steele!” Harry shouted in anger. “Stay down until I can get you out.”

“You’re here to kill me!” Steele contended.

“Just think for a second, will you?” Harry shouted in anger. “Clear away the oatmeal from your brain and think. All your men are dead. The place is being blasted apart. Why the hell should I be here to kill you? All you have to do is stand up to die! Why would I try to rescue you from that if I wanted to kill you?”

Steele whimpered, “I don’t know, but you have your reasons!”

Harry couldn’t afford to wait any longer. The police fire was bad enough, but it would slow down when they realized that no one was

returning their fire. Harry turned his attention to the gas tanks. It was possible that the S.W.A.T. team was trying to avoid hitting those, but the longer they were inside, the worse their chances were of getting out.

Keeping low, Callahan pushed open the door. Steele was sitting in the bathtub seven feet away. He had a Mauser 9mm automatic in his hand. His eyes were bleary, his hair unkempt, and his nose running. He was highly drugged.

Pulling his fingers out of his mouth, Steele pointed the gun at Harry's head. "Don't come any closer," he warned, his face blank. "I'll kill you."

"Then do it!" Harry yelled. "If that's what it takes to convince you, go ahead!"

The two men stared at each other for five seconds as the police fire continued to howl around them. The cop's face was set, but Steele's visage was covered in amazement. It finally dawned on him that Callahan wasn't his assassin.

Following that realization came little unintelligible murmurs. He seemed to forget about Harry, lowering the gun and looking at the tub's faucet.

Harry breathed again. All he had to do now was drag Steele out the hole in the kitchen floor and wait until McKay's Armageddon subsided.

He looked back down the hallway. The attack seemed to be tapering off. Harry looked back to Steele in time to see him putting the automatic in his mouth.

"No!" he roared, leaping forward. He got his hand on the Mauser just as Steele pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER

Fourteen

Steele's head rose above Harry's hand and splattered against the pink tiles. Callahan fell back against the sink as Steele's body slowly slid into the tub. On the way down, his shoulder turned on the hot water tap. He came to rest beneath the spigot as a stream of liquid washed his headless body.

Harry holstered his now empty Magnum. Then he was hurled against the medicine chest as a propane tank exploded. The trailer front heaved into the air, pushing the axle off the cinder block foundation.

Harry gathered his thoughts. The detonation of the second tank would be enough to rip the pipes out of their ground moorings. The trailer would slip, catch, and roll down the hill in back, mangling everything inside like dolls caught in an electric washer.

Harry leaped out of the bathroom just as the second tank was engulfed by the flames of the first. He ducked back inside as the second tank exploded, ripping off the trailer's front end and sending hunks of hot, spinning metal through the rest of the interior.

Harry was fighting the combined shock waves a second after. The floor was moving beneath his feet and the walls were waving and cracking like the ocean's surface, but he knew he had to get out before the steel box fell over the side.

The trailer's convulsions were pulling him toward the bedroom, but even if he could slip out a window there, the sliding home would crush him. He pushed himself purposefully down the hall toward the hole in the kitchen floor and the jagged new one in the front.

Harry grappled for holds with all his limbs like a spider. He tumbled over the wall unit which had dropped, spilling the T.V. and stereo. He slipped on some records but managed to keep upright, his arms flailing like windmills.

He made it into the living room, standing amid the bodies, just as the trailer fell off its concrete moorings. The rectangular structure tipped to the right, making the left wall the floor and the floor the right wall.

As hard as he tried to ride it, Harry was thrown down, the vision of

the yawning escape holes ripped from his view. He fell heavily, feeling some glass break under his weight and a metal fist punching him in the stomach.

His hand fell onto this fist just as the mobile home continued to roll sideways and back. He felt it give under his grip as the room started to spin again. Harry felt the new floor going backwards and then dropping out from under him completely. He realized that what he had fallen on was the door—the metal fist being the knob. It had swung open when the trailer had rolled onto its ceiling, dropping him out with a load of debris.

Callahan raised his head in time to see the trailer dip over the apex of the hill. He heard the wrenching crash as he pulled himself painfully up and ran for the incline's lip.

He arrived just as the shattered trailer came to a stop near the drain Harry had first entered.

The S.W.A.T. teams ran toward it while only Bressler came over to Harry. "I tried to stop it," he swore. "But it was too late." He looked at the scurrying enforcers, who looked like ants encircling a particularly tasty morsel. "At least they didn't get you," he said with resignation.

"But they got the only proof I had," Harry replied through gritted teeth, holding onto his battered side.

"Forget it," Bressler contended. "Let's get back to headquarters, get you a doctor, and start building a case against them.

"Too late," Harry maintained. "If something isn't done right away, they'll be long gone."

"So what are you going to do?" Bressler asked with exasperation. "What more can you do?"

Harry looked directly at Bressler, the expression in his eyes extremely pained. "I've got to walk into the lion's den."

Golden Gate Park was heavenly quiet compared to the hellish chaos of McLaren Park. While the rain at the latter seemed like a pounding punishment, the rain here seemed calm and natural. While it smashed down on the trailer's roof, sounding like a thousand fights, here it dropped off the trees and grass like a peaceful waterfall.

The street was quiet at this time of night save for the tortured steps of Inspector Harry Callahan up the stairs of Kim Byrnes' apartment house. He knew it was likely that no one would be home, but to his surprise, the locked door was buzzed open at his first ring.

Similarly, Kim's door was open on the second floor. Harry pushed it back and walked into the darkened rooms. He moved in quickly,

pushing himself back against the wall, his Magnum in his hand. As he tried to peer into the darkness, the girl's bedroom door opened, light flooding in from the other side.

She stood there, the illumination silhouetting her curves. "Harry?" she called quietly.

"You decided to tough it out," he stated flatly from the darkness.

"Harry?" she called again as if she hadn't heard. "What do you mean?"

"You figured with Steele dead we had no solid evidence against you, so all you had to do was stop killing and there was nothing anyone could do. You had committed the perfect mass murder."

"I don't know what you mean," her featureless face said.

"Then let me spell it out for you," Harry said. "I knew there was a leak in the department. The press knew too much about everything for there not to be. A man who I had been following just before this case said so. He said he had an 'in' at the department.

"Then, all of a sudden, not only the press but SAFE knew all there was to know. They were ready for me at every turn. From there, it was simple. There had to be somebody who had a connection with the cops and SAFE. That connection was you. I told you what was going down and you told Steele."

"Harry, that's crazy," she breathed, although remaining motionless in the doorway. "Why would I do anything like that?"

"You've got me," Harry admitted. "But it had to be you. Steele and his men were flying so high on PCP that you could've controlled them easily."

"It still doesn't make sense," the girl said evenly, as if reminding Harry.

"It doesn't have to," Harry contended. "The lab told me that all the dead SAFE men and all the dead McLaren corpses had something in common. All the men were snow blind and all the women were once homosexuals belonging to SAFE. The first corpse was three years old. You came to town three years ago."

"That doesn't prove anything," the girl spoke with a sigh. "There are still a lot of holes."

"All the holes are plugged up if you had an accomplice. A cop connection who supplied you with the drugs to feed Steele, who did all the raping, and filled in all the police information you couldn't get from me."

"A cop?" she exclaimed. "What makes you think there was a cop, Harry?"

“You shouldn’t have called McKay with the tip about Steele’s trailer,” he answered. “Only someone on the inside would skip me and Lieutenant Bressler to go right for the man they knew would go off half-cocked.”

The two stood their ground, Harry in the darkness just inside the front door and Kim still just a black shape in the bedroom frame.

“You got a load of nothing, Inspector,” she said coldly. “Without Steele, you’ve got no solid evidence.”

Harry smiled, reaching for the light switch. “That’s why I figured you’d stay,” he said cunningly. “If you ran now, it would look suspicious. And you had to know how much I knew.”

Byrnes nodded again. “Enough of this,” she said firmly. “What do you want, Callahan?”

Harry hunkered up the wall, his sore side complaining as he prepared himself. His throat tightened and his muscles bunched. “I can’t let you get away with it,” he said, forcing the words out of his mouth one at a time.

The lights went on immediately. Harry’s hand swept over from the switch, which he had not touched. He wrapped his fingers around his Magnum butt and pointed it directly at the girl. His index finger was tightening on the trigger when he saw that the female in the doorway was not Byrnes, but the bound and gagged figure of Lynne McConnell.

“I was afraid of that,” Byrnes’ voice continued from behind the hostage cop, who looked like she was just barely able to stay upright with help. The lower half of her face was tightly swathed in bandages and her hands were secured behind her with her own handcuffs. She was wearing the same outfit Harry had last seen her in.

“Put it down, Callahan,” Byrnes said. “Put down the gun or she gets it in the back.”

“Then you’ll lose your shield,” Harry said, his teeth grinding against each other, his gun still.

“If you were going to shoot through her to get to me, you would have done it already,” Byrnes said. “Drop it or watch her die.”

Harry dropped his gun.

“Kick it over here,” she instructed. He did as he was told. “All right,” Byrnes continued. “Go get it, Art.”

Slipping out from behind McConnell was a young man with a mustache in a police uniform. He scooped up Harry’s weapon and pointed it at Harry with a wide, winning smile.

“Patrolman Arthur Sullivan, I presume?” Harry said, his hands at his side. The man’s smile disappeared.

“How did you know?” he asked,

“I know all the cops in this city,” Harry said wearily. “And the only easy way Byrnes could have gotten raped and Patterson murdered by one cop was if it was done by the Golden Gate Park patrolman—which was you.”

“So you knew,” Sullivan said. “All the time, you knew.”

“He knew nothing!” Kim interrupted, pushing McConnell forward. In Byrnes’ hand was the cop’s own silver .357. “I told you he knew nothing, but no, you had to make sure. If you hadn’t told me to report the rape in the first place none of this would’ve happened.”

“He would’ve traced Patterson to you,” Sullivan maintained, motioning his head toward Harry. “He would have made the connection.”

“So now he has anyway,” Byrnes argued. “I told you we should’ve taken off.”

“We will,” Sullivan promised, turning back to Harry. “We had to know how much you knew,” he repeated. “You see, I heard what you told Steele up on Mount Douglas. I knew you were getting close. So, just in case, I picked up the sergeant on the way here. I drugged her so heavily that she won’t remember a thing. I could check you out without her checking me out, you get it?”

“Enough of this shit,” Byrnes cursed. “Let’s get out of here.”

Sullivan looked back at Harry, the smile again on his face. “You heard the little lady, Inspector,” he said philosophically. “I’ve never killed another cop before. Especially one of such high rank, but there’s always a first time, I guess.” He raised the .44 until the barrel pointed right between Harry’s eyebrows.

“Goodbye, Inspector,” Sullivan said.

CHAPTER

Fifteen

"Don't move," Harry said.

Both looked at Harry.

"Give yourselves up," he went on.

Byrnes laughed. "What the fuck are you babbling about? What are you going to do to stop us?"

"You won't get two miles," Callahan promised.

"Are you kidding?" Sullivan said incredulously. "After the slaughter at the trailer park, McKay would have stamped a big Case Closed on the Mortician Murderer file."

"Lieutenant Bressler is surrounding the place now," Harry contended.

"Bressler doesn't have enough balls to become a juggler," Sullivan said. "Even if he did, he couldn't get the clearance from McKay. There's not enough evidence."

"There is now," Harry said. "I told you that I first got wind of the leak in the force from a phone conversation which I was bugging. After the theater fight, I simply had my partner move the equipment from the hitman's hotel room to here while I was . . . entertaining . . . Byrnes at my apartment."

The uniformed cop and the girl's cunning, triumphant expressions began to melt.

"Motherfucking bitch!" Byrnes yelled. The patrolman looked stupefied.

"You take one step out of this apartment and you're dead," Harry warned.

"Then I'm going to take you and this cunt with me!" Byrnes screamed, pushing the .357 forward.

She pulled the trigger as Harry jumped back out of the doorway. The bullet just missed his head and plowed into the hallway's plaster wall. Harry slammed awkwardly against the bannister, his wounds from the trailer episode groaned in paralyzing pain. His knees began to give way as he grabbed onto the thick bannister with all his might.

Looking over his shoulder, he saw Byrnes running toward him, the

shiny revolver still held out in front of her. He pulled himself up and vaulted over the stairway. He dropped onto the middle of the steps, his legs too weak to hold him. He tumbled head first the rest of the way, hearing Byrnes fire the gun at him.

He stopped in a dazed heap on the first floor landing, the inside of his head feeling like a whirpool. He tried to force his eyes to focus. By the time he had attained just a slim level of coherence, Byrnes was halfway down the stairs, waiting until she could get a clear bead on the cop. Behind her, Sullivan was holding the .44 against McConnell's head.

Harry twisted to the side just as Kim fired again. The ballet hit the wall and Harry rolled to the middle of the landing.

Byrnes, growling obscenities, got to the landing and turned the corner just as Fatso Devlin kicked open the cellar door.

Harry was between the two. Byrnes pulled her revolver up, shooting Devlin in the stomach just as his first shot shattered the front door window behind her. Both Harry and she heard the cop fall back down the stairs where the bugging equipment was secreted.

"All right, you motherfucker," Byrnes told the still groggy Callahan, lining up the shot, "there's no escape this time." She pulled the trigger. "Die, you bastard!"

The hammer clicked on an empty chamber.

Harry rose from the floor like a bear coming out of hibernation. With a maddened shriek, she threw the empty gun into his face and ran toward the front door.

The .357 tore across Harry's temple as he turned away. He fell against the wall, blinded. Byrnes looked out to see three patrol cars screeching to the curb.

"Give me the Magnum!" she shouted up at Sullivan. "I'm going to kill him if it's the last thing I do!"

"Come on, Kim!" he answered. "We'll hold the girl hostage."

"Fuck the girl," she spat, running toward him. "We'll get out the back way."

Harry had just steadied himself, wiping away the curtain of blood that drooled from his new wound, as Bressler charged in the front door.

"They're trying to get out the back," Harry said quickly. "They've got my gun. Fatso's downstairs and he's hit."

"Back up the others," Bressler told his men. "Block all surrounding streets." The men followed orders instantly, some going back the way they had come, others pounding up the stairs.

Bressler took Harry gingerly under the arm. Callahan shook the helping hand off. “Thanks,” he said tightly. “But not yet.”

One of the attacking officers stuck his head over the bannister on the second floor. “They broke into another apartment. They got out on the fire escape!”

“So where the hell are they now?” Bressler shouted back.

In answer, a squeal of tires came from the street. Harry was out of the door first, in spite of his wounds. He saw Sullivan’s patrol car screeching out of the alley, sending the cops there scattering in all directions. He took a right down the street, only to be blocked—on both sides—by other cars. All the men were firing pointblank at him.

The auto’s tires exploded and the vehicle took off. It seemed to soar like a plane, then its right front fender caught the tail of a perpendicularly parked car. It spun, sliding onto the opposite sidewalk, careened off the park fence and smashed head on into another patrol vehicle. The car flipped up, landing on its roof across the other auto’s top.

It had hardly come to a smoking halt when Harry was limping toward it. Ignoring all the others, he pushed his way to the sandwiched vehicles. Wiping the blood from his eyes again, Harry peered through the crushed metal and shattered glass.

Only Sullivan was inside, hanging upside down. His eyes and mouth were open, but his entire face was crushed against the steering wheel. Blood poured out of his mouth and cracks in his skull.

“I want this whole block searched inch by inch,” Harry demanded. “She’s holding a cop hostage, but I don’t want that girl to get away. Do whatever you have to, but stop her.”

“Harry,” Bressler interrupted. “McConnell . . .”

“Byrnes was responsible for killing more than twenty members of SAFE,” Harry said quickly back. “If we hadn’t uncovered the McLaren graveyard, she would have gone on without us even knowing it. If we don’t stop her here, she’ll go on killing someplace else. So get going, Al. Get her.”

Bressler nodded. “Are you sure you’ll be OK?”

“Fuck that,” Harry answered angrily. “Get her!”

Bressler moved away quickly, following his men. Harry slowly, and not quite steadily, made his way among the cops still stationed around the apartment house. He borrowed a handkerchief from one to stem the still flowing blood.

He reached the front steps just as Devlin was being carried out on a stretcher by a medical team. Callahan followed the procession of

paramedics until they reached the ambulance. When Devlin saw him, he laughed painfully.

"Now I'll just be another on the long list of Callahan casualties," he grimaced as the medicos slipped him inside.

"How is he?" Harry asked one of the men as they closed the door behind him.

"Gut wound," the man considered. "Banged up pretty bad, but he'll live, I guess." Then he noticed Harry. "You don't look too good yourself. Better come along. You can sit in back with your friend."

"I have to wait," Harry said flatly, walking away. He picked up McConnell's empty revolver in the main hall, then made a casual search of the building until he wound up in a dead end alley out back.

It was empty and dark, the cops having searched it completely. Looking up at the fire escape, Harry stumbled. He looked down and saw the cover of a manhole.

His mind cleared instantly. He shoved the gun into his belt and reached down, letting the blood smeared handkerchief fall from his forehead. With a strength he couldn't find minutes ago, he pulled the cover up and laid it aside.

Blackness yawned beneath him, accompanied by the sound of rushing water. In the distance, he could see the glimmer of yellow light. Without thinking twice, he lowered himself into the hole.

Harry climbed down the ladder until his feet rested on concrete. The sewage tunnel was lit by a string of low watt, naked bulbs hung on the wall. The walk was about five feet wide. Beside it was the high, rushing water the rain had dumped onto the city. It was flowing so fast that it lapped onto the walk itself.

Harry was at one end of a forty foot length. At the other end, where the tunnel forked, was Kim Byrnes, holding the drugged Lynne McConnell in front of her. The .44 Magnum was still clutched in her hand.

"You're just in time, Harry," Byrnes called. "I was deciding which way to go. But first, throw the gun away."

Harry lifted the empty .357 from his waistband and tossed it into the rushing water. In spite of its weight, he could see it being dragged along with the current.

"Looks like I get to kill you and your girlfriend after all," she said pleasantly after the gun had swept by her. "Lucky me."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "It was Lucky You all along. Everybody danced to your tune. But what for? Why all the death?"

"Why not?" Byrnes said lightly, shrugging. "When I came to San

Francisco, Lisa was kind enough to show me everything, including Steele's organization. He hated himself, you know. What I said in the hospital was true. He hated homosexuals, hated being homosexual, and took it out on those around him. One of them was Art Sullivan.

"So I made a deal with Steele's whipping boy. We had a plan to get back at all of them. And it worked, perfectly, too, until the graveyard was uncovered."

"Then you had to get a Mortician Murderer," Harry surmised.

"You got it, stupid," she taunted. "Sullivan got to prove himself a man by raping all the others while I got off on putting them in their place. Six feet under."

Harry could see it clearly. Byrnes was used to getting anything she wanted. She had the body and mind for it. With looks like hers, he could see her trying everything, and not just once.

What she found was homosexuality. She must've really gotten off on manipulating everyone while hating them at the same time. Getting bored of that, she finally saw a way to attain the ultimate thrill. The ultimate power. Harry could now understand why Steele killed himself. At the last minute he saw who and what Kim was. He saw how stupid he had been. He had seen something in her that he couldn't fully believe. Finally, he knew that if her evil lived on, there would be no hope for the world of brotherhood and peace he envisioned.

It all was going to end in the overflowing sewage tunnel beneath the city's streets. Harry swore to it.

"That's it then," he told her.

"Yeah," she concurred. "All over. For now."

"No," Harry disagreed, beginning to move forward. "All over, period."

"Don't be stupid, Harry," she said. "You're only making it easier for me to get a perfect shot."

"No more victims," Harry said, coming on. "It's time to pay the piper."

"You are nuts," Byrnes laughed. "What do you think? I'm not going to shoot? Well, keep walking asshole, and find out." She let go of McConnell, who fell forward onto the walk, then brought the Magnum up, holding it in both hands straight out from her face.

"You're too clever," Harry told her, walking forward slowly and deliberately. "You're too beautiful . . ."

"Yeah, keep talking, smart guy," Byrnes said with bravado. "First you go, then your bitch here." She kicked McConnell's prone body.

“But more than anything else . . .” Harry said, then he charged.

The move was sudden, the psychology sound. Callahan went from marching evenly to speeding forward, his head down. No matter how prepared Byrnes thought she was for such a move, Harry had cut off perfectly in the middle of a sentence. And she had never fired a .44 Magnum before.

The gun boomed, trying to wrench itself out of her hands like a panicked cat clawing up a tree. She just managed to hold onto the weapon as the first bullet went over Harry’s head.

She brought it down quickly, Callahan’s face filling her sights. He had enough time to duck because the .44 required more than the usual amount of finger pressure to pull the trigger. He saw her hand muscles tighten and the hammer go back before he rolled out of its way.

The gun bucked again, the bullet splattering on the walk, shards ricocheting off the wall and into the water. Panicking, she tried to pull the gun back down again just as Harry hit her in the stomach.

She doubled over and Callahan grabbed the Magnum’s cylinder. He stood, shoving the flat of his hand against Byrnes’ twisted, angry face. She fell back, letting all her weight pull on the trigger. But Harry’s grip was stronger.

Realizing this, she let go of the gun and toppled backward into the water.

Harry knew instantly what she was trying to do. There was a chance that she could still reach freedom. Without pausing, Harry flipped the gun around and fired.

Without a chance to aim, the bullet slashed into the raging water inches from her splashing body.

He pulled the gun forward, sighting at the rapidly diminishing body. The second shot hit her in the left thigh. Harry saw the gusher of blood rise out of her leg, but he knew it wasn’t enough to stop her. If she had a chance to disappear around the corner, it was possible that she would survive to murder again.

The third shot grazed her right shoulder, tearing off pieces of her shirt. The aim was getting more and more difficult. She was growing small in the dark, her body rolling in the broiling current. In a second, she would be gone.

Harry knew there was only one bullet left in the chamber as he tried to get her in his sights. The blood from his temple was streaming over his eyes, and his side was throbbing.

“But more than anything else . . . ,” Harry repeated under his

breath. He pulled the trigger.

Kim Byrnes' head erupted in an explosion of bone, blood, and brain which was instantly swallowed up by the water and swept away.

". . . you were too lucky to live," Harry finished.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANE HARTMAN was a Warner Books imprint pseudonym used by two American novelists, Ric Meyers and Leslie Alan Horvitz. "Hartman" was credited as the author of the Dirty Harry action series based on the “Dirty” Harry Callahan character of the popular 1970’s and 1980’s films starring Clint Eastwood.

Following the release of the third Dirty Harry movie, The Enforcer, in 1976, Clint Eastwood made it clear that he did not intend to make any more Dirty Harry movies. In 1981, Warner Books (the publishing arm of Warner Bros., which made the films) began publishing a number of men's adventure series under its now-defunct "Men of Action" line. One such series features the further adventures of Inspector Harry Callahan. The series was brought to an end when Eastwood decided to direct, produce, and star in a fourth Dirty Harry movie, Sudden Impact, which was released in December 1983.